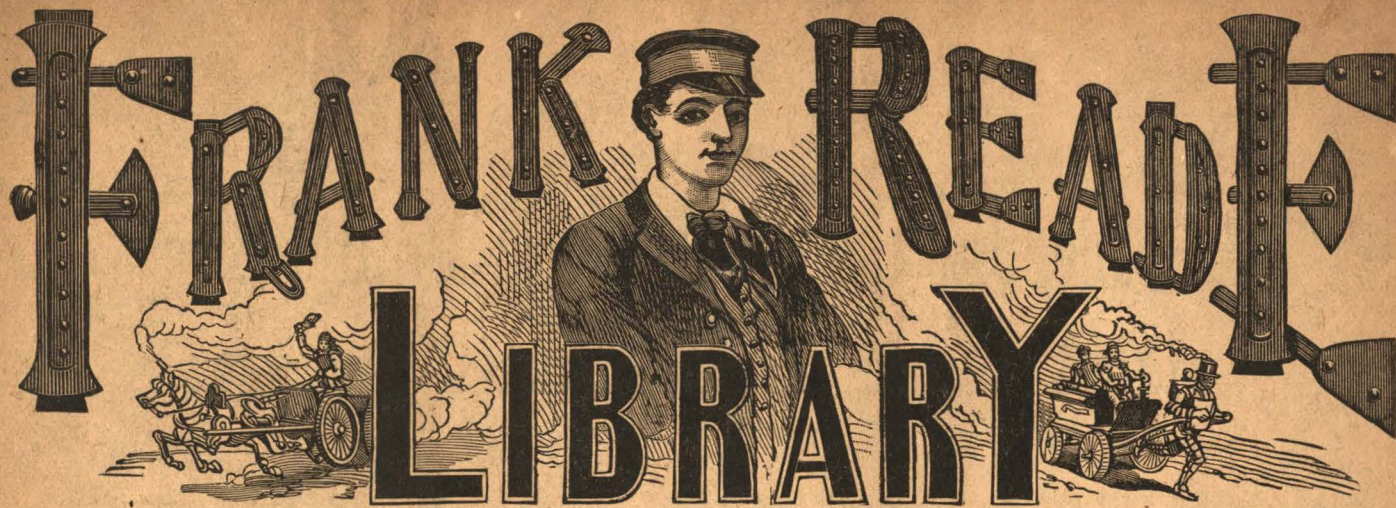


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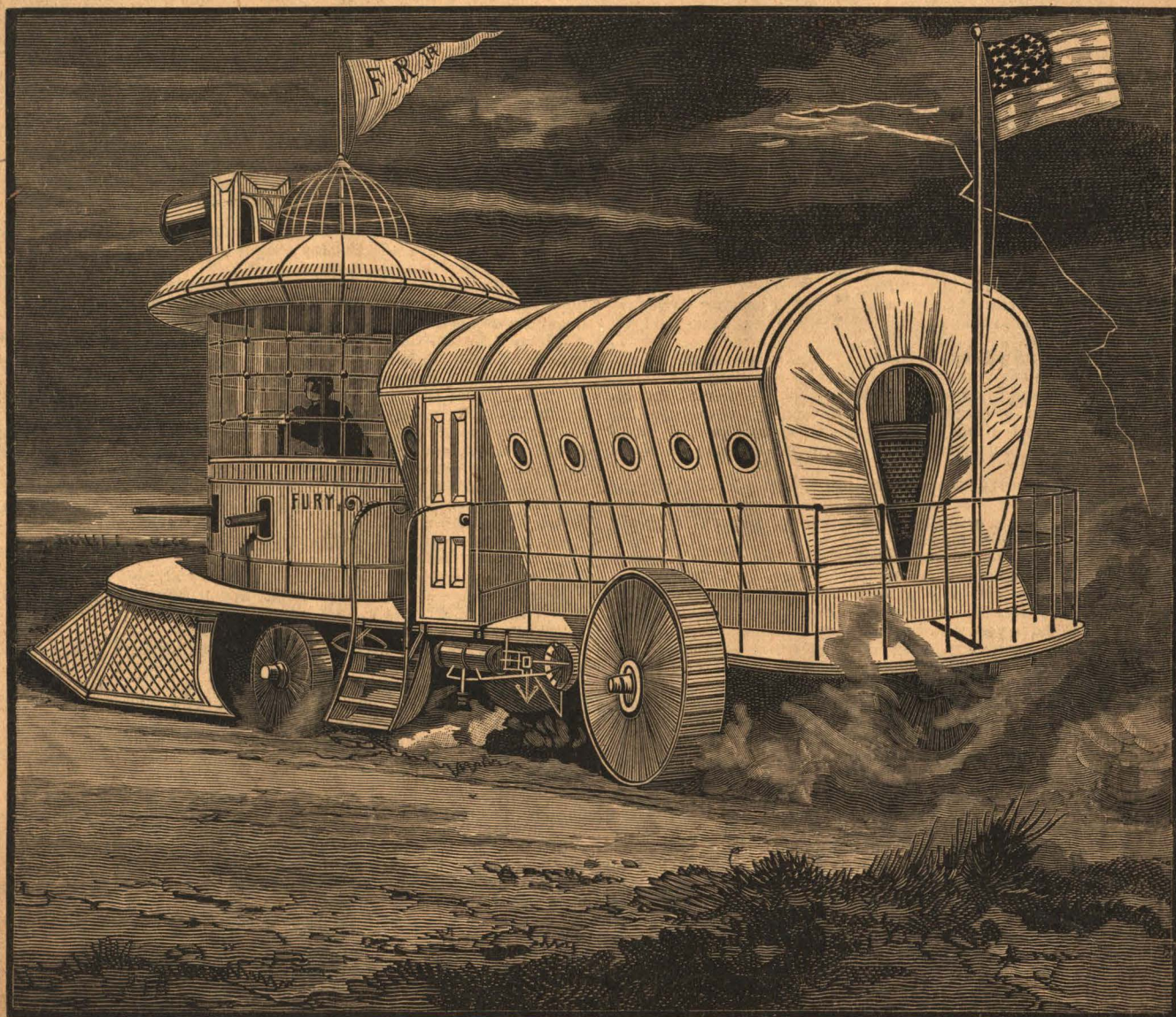
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Frank Reade, Jr.,

And His Electric Prairie Schooner; or,
FIGHTING THE MEXICAN HORSE THIEVES.

By "NONAME."



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Frank Reade, Jr., and His Electric Prairie Schooner;

OR, FIGHTING THE MEXICAN HORSE THIEVES.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His Air Ship in Asia," "Frank Reade, Jr., in the Far West," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

CATCHING A SPY.

"THE job is worth fifty thousand dollars."

"Quite an inducement."

"Do you care to earn it?"

"The sum is very trifling to me."

"Trifling! Why, good heavens, it's a fortune."

"It might be to a poor man, Mr. Goodwin."

"I beseech you not to refuse my offer. I know you are a very rich young man, Frank Reade, Jr., but the fact is the ranchmen whom I represent cannot afford to pay any more for the work they are anxious to have you perform for them."

"Oh, it isn't the amount of the reward that troubles me. I am really in doubt as to whether it would pay me in fun and adventure to take my new electric prairie schooner all the way from here in Readestown down to the Texan border to fight the Mexican horse thieves who have been robbing your ranches."

The two men who were speaking sat in the large, handsome library of a mansion in the little city of Readestown.

One of them, called Mr. Goodwin, was a middle-aged man, clad in a neat suit of clothes, his angular face covered by a gray beard.

He was the owner of a Texan cattle ranch.

The other was the proprietor of the mansion in which the dialogue ensued, and was a celebrated inventor of electric overland engines, flying machines and submarine boats.

Frank Reade, Jr. was a finely built, handsome young man with strong nerves, powerful muscles, an inordinate love of dangerous adventure, and a most daring disposition.

He had recently perfected the construction of a peculiar device resembling one of the old time prairie schooners to run upon land by electro motive force.

It was built for the purpose of testing its utility as a means of aggression or defense upon land in time of war or rebellion.

The press representatives of the country having witnessed its initial trip had given great publicity to the matter, whereupon the young inventor received this call from Mr. Goodwin who had made Frank a proposition to use the engine to suppress a gang of horse thieves.

The gentleman from Texas smiled broadly at Frank's remark:

"If you are in quest of fun and adventure," said he, "I can safely assure you that you will have more than you expect, if you will undertake to do this work for us."

"Will you kindly give me a detailed explanation of your case," politely asked the famous young inventor.

"Certainly. There are, as you must know, all along the Texas border, on the Rio Grande, numerous cattle ranches. The owners, of which I am one, have been also raising many valuable horses. Down in Mexico a most dangerous gang of thieves was organized by a bandit named Domingo, the Demon. He is a cruel, crafty and savage dispositioned outlaw, and his band of fifty vaqueros are all vagabond ruffians equally as bad and reckless as he. Discovering our horses, they have been repeatedly crossing the border, and raiding the ranges. The cattle are driven over the Rio Grande and sold. Despite our own efforts, assisted by our cowboys, the aid lent us by the reservation troops and the bands of vigilantes, we have never been able to catch the villains. A syndicate of ranch owners was formed, consisting of those who lost by the depredations of the thieves. We made a pool of \$50,000 as a reward for the extermination of the gang under Domingo, the Demon. Having read an account of the formidable engine you invented, I was detailed to call on you as a representative of the syndicate. My mission was to offer you this reward as an inducement to you to employ your new invention in the extermination of the horse thieves."

"So that's the trouble, eh?" asked Frank, thoughtfully.

"And quite sufficient, for by these raids we annually lose horses to the value of twice that sum. Now what is your answer, Mr. Reade—will you undertake the task?"

"You are hazarding a good deal of money on an uncertainty, ain't

you?" asked Frank. "How do you know that the prairie schooner is capable of performing the work you want done?"

"Oh, I was in Readestown yesterday when you gave an exhibition of the machine to the Government experts who came here on your invitation to witness the performance of the engine. I therefore had an opportunity of witnessing the operation of the invention, and was very favorably impressed with the terrific power of the two hydraulic guns she carried."

"Ah, I see! I did not know that you had seen her. Now the fact is, that although I have offered my patent for sale to the United States, it will be a long time before anything can be done about the purchase. Congress will have to make a suitable appropriation for the transaction. There will be no end of legal proceeding. In the meantime the Fury, as I have named the machine, must lie idle. I may as well make use of her."

"Then you consent?" eagerly asked Mr. Goodwin with a smile.

"No; not yet," replied Frank, shaking his head.

"Why not?" was the disappointed query, as the man's face fell.

"Because I will first have to consult with two old friends who invariably accompany me on the trips I make with my inventions."

"You mean the negro and the Irishman?"

"Barney O'Shea and Pomp," acquiesced the inventor, nodding.

"They are a pair of brave fellows, always playing practical jokes upon each other, ready for fun or a fight at any time, and are very much devoted to me."

As Frank thus praised his friends, he happened to glance up at one of the windows, when he suddenly caught sight of a man's face peering around one side of the casing.

This individual had a dark, swarthy countenance, a long, sharp nose, jet black eyes with an ugly expression, and wore a long black mustache on his thin, cadaverous face.

He had a slouched hat upon his long black hair, and a most sinister expression upon his bony countenance.

As the window was half open to admit the pleasant June breeze, it was very evident to Frank that the lurking stranger had been listening to all the foregoing conversation.

There was nothing of a particularly private nature in what had been said, but it angered the young inventor very much to see the dark-faced stranger eavesdropping there.

He did not say a word to Mr. Goodwin about it, but rose to his feet and with one bound he sprang through the window, carrying the shades and curtains with him.

Landing on the ground, he heard a hoarse voice cry beside him:

"Per Dios! I'm caught!"

A quick glance showed Frank the man who had been looking in.

He caught the fellow by the collar, shook him angrily, and demanded:

"What were you sneaking around here for?"

"You leta me go!" hissed the big, burly fellow, struggling to get away.

"Not until you give an account of yourself, sir!"

"Compadre! I make you!" hoarsely cried the stranger.

"Do you want me to put you in jail?"

A savage expletive in Spanish escaped the man, and he pulled a long knife from his breast pocket and drew it back to plunge the blade into Frank's body.

There was a demoniacal expression upon the Mexican's face and a dark scowl upon his brow, while in his snaky black eyes gleamed a lurid fire that betrayed a ferocious disposition.

Before he could stab Frank, the inventor's fist shot out like a gunshot and caught him between the eyes.

It was a sledgehammer blow, and it knocked the Mexican sprawling upon the ground flat on his back.

He uttered a yell of pain and rage as he went down, and Mr. Goodwin now appeared in the window.

As soon as his glance fell upon the man, he cried, excitedly:

"By heavens, it's Domingo the Demon!"

"This man?" asked Frank, in astonishment.

"Yes; he is the Mexican horse thief I told you of."

"But what is he doing here?"

"I tella you dat!" hissed the rascal, as he got upon his feet and brandished his dagger at Frank. "I hear dem rancheros say dat dey weel come here to get your engine, an' I follow heem from Texas to keel you, so you not can work for dem. An' now, *por el demonio*, I keepa my oath!"

Maddened by the blow Frank had given him, the outlaw sprang at the young inventor to avenge himself.

The next moment they met.

Frank grasped the man's wrist, holding back the knife so he could not use it, and a desperate struggle ensued.

In the midst of it a red-headed, freckle-faced Irishman came rushing toward them from the direction of the immense shops in which Frank constructed his inventions.

He was Barney O'Shea, the young inventor's friend, and a yell pealed from his lips and he flourished a blackthorn shillalah he carried as he saw Frank fall with the Mexican on top of him.

"Whoop!" he howled. "A ruction, bejabers! Bang blazes out av ther sooker, Masther Frank. Howly floy—de's down, an' ther baste atop av him. Lave him be, ye shpalpeen, or I'll bate ther head av ye!"

Up to the combatants rushed the Celt, and before the Mexican could murder the inventor, Barney rattled a tattoo all over Domingo's head and shoulders, and disarmed him.

The Mexican was wild.

He sprang to his feet, shook his fist at Barney, and roared:

"I avenge dese blows dearly—dearly!"

"Come on!" roared Barney. "I'm ready, ye blackguard!"

But to his disgust the Mexican started to run away.

He did not proceed far, however, when he ran into a small dorky, with a big head, and a comical face.

It was Pomp, and he had seen all that transpired.

"Clar de track, greaser!" he yelled. "De brack cyclone am comin'."

Then he charged on the Mexican head first, butted him in the stomach, and knocked him over again doubled up like a jack knife and gasping stentoriously for breath.

CHAPTER II.

LIASSO CHARLEY.

CRACK, crack, crack!

Three pistol shots rang out in quick succession, coming from the street.

With a whistling sound the bullets flew around Pomp's woolly head, and glancing up, the coon caught sight of three Mexican friends of Domingo, the Demon, armed with revolvers.

They had come from Mexico with the bandit, and had been keeping watch outside the house while he had followed Mr. Goodwin, and gone around to the library window to listen to what was said inside.

Pomp was not armed.

He realized that it was as much as his life was worth to remain there, and consequently took to his heels.

As soon as they put him to flight, the Mexicans dashed into the yard, picked up their leader, and carried him out.

Domingo quickly recovered.

There were four saddle horses tethered close by.

Seeing that it was now impossible to do anything to prevent Mr. Goodwin from carrying out his plans they dashed away and were never again seen in the vicinity of Readestown.

Pomp joined Frank and the Irishman.

"Fo' de Lawd sakes, wha' de trouble yere?" he asked, breathlessly.

The young inventor explained the cause of Mr. Goodwin's call and all that subsequently transpired.

Barney and Pomp listened with great interest.

"It seems then, from what the Mexican said, that he was anxious to kill me so I could not proceed against him," said Frank, in conclusion. "But he will find after his brutality here that I'll wipe him and his gang out, anyway."

"Faith, it's goin' ter Texas yez bes then?" asked Barney, eagerly.

"Yes, if I can't have him arrested sooner! Will you go?"

"Golly, yes!" assented Pomp, who was delighted at the prospect.

"Be heavens," added Barney, with a grin, "it's loike a roosty nail I'm gittin' intirely fer ther want av a scrimmage. Did yer moind ther way I broke his head wid me shtick?"

"Then that settles it. Pomp, go tell the police to look for them."

The diminutive coon hastened away, and Frank and the Celt went into the library, where Barney was introduced to Mr. Goodwin.

"I see that Domingo escaped," said the ranchman, regretfully.

"Yes, but I've sent Pomp to put the police on his track."

"Should they apprehend him, I will not have to trouble you to go to Mexico and break up his gang then," said Mr. Goodwin, in pleased tones. "Without Domingo to lead them, scheme for them and work for them, the gang would be very badly crippled."

"If he escapes the police I will undertake the work for you," said Frank. "Both of my friends have consented to go."

"Thank Heaven for that assurance!" cried the ranch owner, gratefully. "I will remain in Readestown until you know what to do."

"Now tell me where the bandits have their rendezvous, how they operate to steal your horses, where they dispose of the animals, and any other useful information you possess."

Mr. Goodwin complied.

He then took his departure for an hotel.

Pomp returned from the police station, and apprising Frank that he

had given the authorities information about the horse thieves he went down to the kitchen to prepare supper.

He was a good cook, and as Frank's family and servants had gone to Chicago to remain a week, the coon had taken charge of the culinary department.

Barney picked up a ball of cord when the dorky was out of the way, and quietly making his way out in the hall he tied one end of the twine to the wire of the door bell near the ceiling.

The other end he carried over the door frames back into the dining-room, near his chair.

In a short time Pomp had the meal ready, Frank was called and they all sat down to the table.

Just as the coon was about to take a mouthful of food, the mischievous Irishman who sat next to the hall door, with his back to the wall, gave the string a jerk and the bell rung.

It was Pomp's custom to answer the bell, and he therefore laid down his knife and fork, arose, and hastened out to the door.

Flinging it open, he peered out, and was surprised to see nobody there, whereupon a perplexed look crossed his face, and he muttered:

"Gosh amigbty! Dat am queer. Who dun rung dat bell?"

Waiting a few moments, and no one materializing, he returned to the dining-room, sat down, grasped his knife and fork, and said:

"Dey wasn't nobuddy dar."

"How odd!" remarked Frank.

"Ther nagur's dhrunk!" said Barney.

An angry retort leaped to Pomp's fat lips.

Before he could give utterance to it, however, Barney jerked the string.

Clang! went the bell, and up jumped Pomp again, muttering:

"S'pec's de one wot runged befo' mus' agwine away an' now come back."

He rushed to the door again, and opened it with a bang.

Of course there was no one outside, and the look of astonishment on the coon's face deepened into one of great suspicion.

He saw several boys running along the street, and began to think they had rung the bell for mischief.

"Say, yo' or'nary lillie raskils!" he yelled, shaking his finger at them threateningly. "De nex' time yo' do dat I pull de libber outen yo' gosh blame hides! Yo' heah me? Hum?"

The boys paused, looked at him in injured surprise, and then to resent his unjust suspicion of them, they shot at him with their bean-shooters and ran away.

Pomp recoiled into the hall.

"De rex' time dey pull dat bell I'se gwine ter soak 'em!" he muttered.

Then he stole down in the cellar, got a barrel stave, and returning to the door, he stood crouching beside it ready to pounce on his imaginary tormentors.

"What's the matter out there?" shouted Frank.

"Sh-h-h!" hissed Pomp, gliding in. "Dey's a crowd ob bad boys dingin' de bell, an' I'se gwine ter cotch 'em, sah."

Barney could hardly suppress his mirth.

He was just about to jerk the string again, when someone actually rang the bell, and Pomp went down the hall with a rush.

"Howly mackerel!" roared Barney, bursting into a wild laugh.

"Oh, what a picnic! Watch ther circus, Masther Frank, watch it!" Frank was amazed and peered out in the hall.

Open flew the door, up went Pomp's stove, and bang it went down on the head of a man he saw out on the piazza.

"Ouch!" yelled the stranger.

His hat was telescoped and jammed down over his eyes.

"Fool me, will yo'?" yelled Pomp wildly. "Take dat!"

Biff—bang—thump! went the stave again.

The stranger grappled the coon and they fell down.

Roar after roar of laughter pealed merrily from Barney's lips and he and Frank rushed out to see who the unlucky fellow was.

They found him sitting on Pomp's stomach, pulling the coon's nose and the dorky howled every time his nasal organ got a twist.

"Let up there!" cried Frank. "What the deuce does this mean?"

"It means," replied the stranger, "that I am going to wallup this heathen for trying to cave in the roof of my head."

He was attired very much like a cowboy, only that his hat was a derby, and he had a pleasant face, adorned by a brown mustache and goatee.

His features were rather raw-boned, but besides the honest look in his keen blue eyes, his square jaw and thin lips denoted a nature that was not to be trifled with.

"It am a mistake!" yelled Pomp. "'Fo' de Lawd it am, chile!"

"That's different," said the man, getting up. "I thought you did it on purpose. I object to being pounded into a jelly."

"He thought you were some mischievous boys who have been ringing the door bell to tantalize him," explained Frank.

"Ah, yes—I see."

"Did you call to see me?"

"Are you Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"That's my name."

"I am called Lasso Charley, and I've come to introduce myself."

"Indeed? I can't say I ever heard of you before."

"Didn't Mr. Goodwin mention my name to you?"

"No, sir," answered Frank.

"Well, I'm his superintendent."

"Did you come up from Texas with him?"

"I did, and if you undertake the work of tackling the Mexican horse thieves, he wants me to go with you on the electric engine."

"You don't say so. What for?"

"As I am well acquainted with the looks of the outlaws, know their haunts, understand their plans, and so on, Goodwin thought I would be a good helper for you."

"You certainly would," assented Frank. "Come in and I'll talk to you about the matter, sir."

They passed inside, and Barney and Pomp followed.

The string by which the Irishman operated the bell had fallen to the floor, and Pomp now caught sight of it.

Instantly he comprehended how he had been fooled.

"Bress de Lamb!" he gasped. "It wuz yo' wot ding the bell."

"Arrah, it's a George Washintin I am entirety—I cannot tell a loy!" said Barney, grinning from ear to ear.

"See de trubble yo' got me in. By gosh, I'm goin' ter kill yo'!"

He seized the stave and made a rush for Barney, but that practical joker discreetly fled, and the coon chased him.

Frank had entered the parlor, and in a brief conversation with Lasso Charley, found he was a very nice fellow.

He gave the inventor lots of useful information, and in conclusion he added, confidentially:

"Now I've got a tremendous secret to impart to you."

"And what may that be?" asked Frank.

"I know the location of four boxes filled with golden nuggets. They are in the horse thieves' territory. If we can get this treasure our fortunes are made. What do you think of that?"

"Splendid!" said Frank, enthusiastically. "Tell me about the treasure."

"Very well, sir; listen."

CHAPTER III.

DOWN INTO TEXAS.

THE ranch superintendent settled himself back comfortably in his chair, and lit a pipe, for he was an inveterate smoker, and said:

"About a year ago a party of three men met me in Galveston, and engaged me to guide them on an exploring expedition into the heart of Chihuahua. There was the ruins there of an ancient Aztec city, which they desired to explore in search of antiquities. After a long journey, we reached the place on the borders of Lake Del Chichuas. Here, while exploring the ruins, the ground opened under my feet, and I fell into a large, buried room. The lumber forming its roof had rotted from the moisture in the dirt and weeds that had accumulated over it, and the weight of my body had broken it through. When I became accustomed to the gloom, I observed by the faint light coming in through the hole in the roof, that I was in a room which had once been used as a place of worship. It contained a golden image of the patron god of the Aztecs, called Huitzilopochtli, which must have weighed nearly a ton. Now, as 3,685 pounds of gold is worth about one million dollars, you can imagine what a valuable piece of statuary I had found."

"It was magnificent!" said Frank. "Go on."

"Well, sir, my companions hauled me out, heard the news, and delighted over the discovery we proceeded to break the statue to pieces and haul it out of the subterranean vault. Improvising shafts of small trees, with rude boxes fastened to them, we abandoned the hunt for antiquities, hitched the four horses we had ridden to the drags, and distributed the gold among them. Then we started for the Rio Grande as fast as possible, driving the horses and anxious to get our treasure over the border into Texas on United States territory. Unfortunately a band of Mexican outlaws, under command of Domingo the Demon, came riding after us. A spy of his band had discovered what we had and he designed to wrest it from us. Night had fallen, and we reached the river near San Carlos and drove the horses in. Cutting the drags free of the beasts, they sunk to the bottom at a spot which we noted, burying the gold, and we swam the river."

"The outlaws shot at us, and killed my three companions. I was wounded, but escaped on my horse. The bandits failed to find the gold as they did not see what we did, with it, but suspecting it must be somewhere in the vicinity where they last saw us they have since then haunted that vicinage hunting for it."

"But how do you know they haven't got it?"

"Simply because I made several secret trips to the place and have found evidence of its being there yet."

"Then you wish to get it if I go on this trip?"

"By all means, as we can do so with the protection of such a formidable battery as your electric prairie schooner carries. If we succeed in this design, and there are four of us in the party, I will share the gold equally with all hands."

"Here's another inducement for me to go," laughed Frank. "If there's half a million dollars worth of gold there, each one of us would gain \$125,000. That's a magnificent sum. Do you think you could find the resting place of the gold again?"

"Most decidedly. All we need is a diving suit to get it up as it is broken into nuggets small enough for a man to handle."

"I have such diving suits as would be required."

"Then I need say no more."

They continued the conversation at some length further and Lasso Charley then took his leave.

A week passed by uneventfully.

At the expiration of that time the chief of the Readestown police called upon Frank, and met him in the reception room.

"I've got bad tidings for you, Mr. Reade," said he.

"What is it?" questioned Frank, uneasily.

"The villain of a Mexican who caused you so much annoyance was

tracked by a detective down to Matamoras, in his own country, and there got away with his three companions."

"So the officer failed to apprehend them, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry, but we did the best we could."

"Don't mention regret, chief. I'm going after him myself now."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, in my new electric prairie schooner."

The chief went away, and Frank went to see Mr. Goodwin and Lasso Charley at the hotel they were stopping.

He then told them the police news, and signified his readiness to proceed at once for Mexico to exterminate the horse thieves.

Delighted at this news, and sorry to hear that Domingo had made his escape, Mr. Goodwin induced Frank to sign a contract to do the work, and then deposited \$50,000 with a local bank, to be paid to Frank upon order from Goodwin.

The payment was to be made upon the evidence of Lasso Charley that the inventor had taken Domingo the Demon, dead or alive, and broken up his gang.

Handing Frank two arrest warrants, one from Texas and the other for Mexican authorities to legalize his attacks upon the outlaws, Mr. Goodwin took his departure for home.

Lasso Charley was left behind to accompany Frank.

Preparations were made for the journey at once.

The prairie schooner was stocked with food and water, she was equipped with arms, ammunition, and necessary articles of various kinds, and Frank sent word to his family of his intention.

When everything was in readiness, our four friends went to Frank's big shop to board the Fury.

The electric prairie schooner stood in a huge room.

It was an engine fifty feet in length by ten feet in width, mounted on four broad, cogged wheels, and made mostly of aluminum and steel so that its weight was proportionately very slight.

The rear part was built in the form of an old style prairie schooner, pierced by bull's-eyes, and surrounded by a platform upon which two side doors opened.

On each side of it were steps for mounting, beneath was secured some of the mechanism which revolved the driving wheels by a gear wheel, and a cowcatcher like a locomotive hung in front.

Forward of the body stood a metal pilot-house furnished with plate glass, over which metal shutters could be drawn.

The barrels of two hydraulic guns projected from the front of the turret which were operated by a machine inside, the top was furnished with a flag pole and a powerful electric headlight.

A wheel inside was used to steer by turning the front wheels.

Her interior was arranged in the following manner:

The end room contained the provisions, supplies and small arms, the next room was used for cooking at an electrically-heated stove, and eating, and the room back of the turret contained a number of bunks for sleeping.

The mechanism was operated by a large number of electric batteries which were charged with chemicals, and kept in a shallow place under the floor.

Each room had an incandescent lamp, and the headlight with these lamps derived their current from a series of the batteries.

The doors of the shop had been opened.

Frank and Lasso Charley entered the turret through the bedroom.

There were several switches controlling the mechanism in the room, and as Frank turned one it put the engine in motion.

The Fury rolled noiselessly on her flexible springs and left the shop with Barney and Pomp sitting on the front platform, the Irishman playing a fiddle and the coon thumping a banjo.

In this manner they reached the street.

Everyone rushed out to see the departure of the engine, and the avenue through which the Fury proceeded was soon lined with hundreds of men, women and children.

They cheered the electric prairie schooner, waved their hats and handkerchiefs, and gave the adventurers a grand send off.

Frank pulled the switch over further on the board.

Speed was thus added to the wheels, and the machine rushed along furiously, dashed into the country, and sped away at the rate of thirty miles an hour on the smooth, hard road.

She kept on and on for over a week without meeting with any accident, and operating far better than her designer imagined she would, until she was far down in Texas.

It was on a clear, moonlit night when she left Sonora behind, in Sutton County, and went flying over the prairie in the direction of Devil's river which Frank intended following to the Rio Grande.

The young inventor was at the wheel, and his companions were back in the dining-room at supper.

Frank observed that he was following a well-defined trail, and casting his glance casually along the route his attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of several horsemen ahead.

They were so far away that he could not see them distinctly, and he picked up a telescope and squinted through.

The powerful glass showed him that the men he had been looking at were a band of five cowboys, mounted on mustangs and riding forward at the top of the animals' speed.

Further in advance was a drove of horses.

They were being furiously driven by a dozen men clad in the garb of Mexicans, and as soon as Frank saw them and observed what they were doing, he cried:

"By thunder, there are some of the horse thieves now!"

His companions heard his startling cry and rushed into the pilot-house excitedly, demanding eagerly:

"Where, where, where?"

"Look ahead there with this glass," said Frank.

They complied, one after another, and witnessed the scene.

"By George!" exclaimed Lasso Charley. "They are some of Domingo the Demon's gang! I recognize them by their attire. The fellows in back are the cowboys of one of the ranches they have been raiding and are pursuing them to get the animals back."

"Hurroo!" roared Barney. "Put on shteam an' beheavens we'll run thim down an' lambaste ther shtuffin's out av thim!"

"Git yo' guns, chillen!" cried Pomp. "Git yo' guns!"

Away dashed the three into the store-room, and Frank put full speed on the prairie schooner and sent her rushing on like a thunder-bolt in pursuit of the horse thieves.

Faster and faster flew the engine, and passing the terrified cowboys she drew up in back of the Mexican robbers.

CHAPTER IV.

FIGHTING THE MEXICAN HORSE THIEVES.

"HALT, or you are dead men!"

Thus shouted Frank out of the window.

The picturesquely clad Mexicans glanced around.

A dazzling glare was gushing from the big headlight, and half blinded them as it shot into their eyes.

Uttering a shout of alarm at sight of such a singular looking engine pursuing them, they desisted chasing the horses.

Swerving to the right and left, they dug the rowels of their long spurs into the flanks of their steeds, and drew their pistols.

Aiming at the flying prairie schooner, they fired shot after shot at her, the leaden pellets crashing against her metal plates.

None of the bullets penetrated the Fury, for Frank had drawn the metal blinds over the glass plates of the turret.

Seeing that the Mexican horse thieves did not mean to surrender, Frank shouted to his friends:

"Drop their horses from under them!"

The weapons wielded by the crew of the Fury were pneumatic repeating rifles, the projectiles from which were conical bullets, filled with a powerful explosive powder.

These deadly missiles burst like torpedoes when they struck the objects aimed at, giving forth loud detonations.

Soon the air echoed with the explosions, for while Barney and Pomp manned the left hand side of the prairie schooner and fired on the whole horde who went to the west, Frank and Lasso Charley were shooting out the bulls'-eyes on the right hand side.

Crack, crack, crack! roared the bursting bullets.

"Bang, bang, bang!" came the Mexicans' answering shots.

The Fury had not been idle.

She sped along, first after one half the gang, then after the other.

Shot after shot was given and returned.

The horse thieves fired at random.

But not a wild shot came from our friends.

They made every one tell.

Each time they discharged a weapon a Mexican horse fell and flung its half frantic rider to the prairie grass.

Within a brief space of time the whole gang was dismounted, and the cowboys came dashing up on their mustangs.

Seeing several of the Mexicans running, Frank drove the Fury after them at a terrific rate of speed.

"Halt!" he screamed.

"Never!" yelled one of the thieves.

"Then I'll run you down!"

And bang! went the cowcatcher against his legs.

A shriek pealed from the Mexican as he was hurled into the air.

The inventor hauled the steering wheel around, and away tore the Fury in pursuit of another man.

In the meantime the cowboys were charging the rest of the gang, exchanging pistol shots with them.

Along swept the Fury.

Bang! went her cowcatcher again.

The second thief was flung skyward.

He fell with a broken leg.

Seeing the others running in the opposite direction, the Celt, the coon and the superintendent shot at them.

"There goes the leader of the gang!" cried the ranchman.

"Which one?" demanded Frank from the pilot house.

"The big fellow with the white sombrero."

"I'll follow him up."

"Do you want to see me corral him?"

"How do you mean?"

"I'm the most expert lassoer in Texas—you'll see."

He had gained the soubriquet he bore in consequence of his dexterity with the noosed line, and now, proud of his skill picked up a lasso, and went out on the front platform.

The engine was flying after a burly Mexican.

Lasso Charley arranged his line, and when they arrived near enough to the horse thief, he whirled the coils around in the air over his head and let them fly.

Out shot the lasso, uncoiling as it flew through the air, the big noose spread itself in a ring above the Mexican's head, and then it fell over his shoulders and down his body.

A backward jerk of Lasso Charley's arm tightened the noose around the man's legs and he pitched over on the ground.

As the engine rushed ahead and passed the Mexican, he was drag-

ged along with it over the ground, screaming with pain and swearing with rage.

"Stop her and I'll secure him, Reade!"

"All right!" Frank answered, reversing the switch.

He put on the brake when the current was cut out of the induction coils, and the Fury came to a prompt pause.

Down to the ground jumped Lasso Charley.

He rushed up to the fallen Mexican, and with wonderful dexterity rolled the man up in the lasso, pinioning his arms at his side and rendering him utterly helpless.

Barney and Pomp cheered his skillful work.

Frank glanced back and saw that all the thieves had now surrendered to the cowboys, and as they were being bound, the lassoer put his prisoners aboard the Fury, the two who were struck by the cowcatcher were picked up, and they ran to the herders.

"Got all of them now?" shouted Frank, opening the window.

"Yes. But what the deuce is that thing, stranger?" one of the cowboys replied, pointing at the prairie schooner.

"An electric wagon," Frank replied.

"Hello, there, Lasso Charley, where in thunder did you come from?"

"I'm one of the crew of this vehicle, boys. I see you've had a raid on your ranch. But they're all nipped. This machine is the one chartered by the combine. Let me introduce you to Frank Reade, Jr."

The rough but kind-hearted herders cheered Frank with a will as he appeared, and one of them said:

"We've chased these varmints over an hour. Yer see they swooped down on ther range an' jist rode away ther hull corral fer fair. Glad ye come, or we'd alost ther pesky greasers."

"How about your nags?" asked Frank.

"Thar goes ther hull kit an' caboodle o' them."

"Wait here and we'll round them up and return them."

And so saying, Frank sent the electric prairie schooner streaking after the stolen animals at the top of her speed.

She swiftly gained on the herd.

Then she made a detour, got around in front of the bunched animals, and gradually turned their heads the other way.

As soon as they were started back for their own range, Frank sent the engine flying after the beasts to keep them moving.

Two of the cowboys then resumed the chase on horseback, and as they were now bound to get back home in good order, Frank returned to where the prisoners were.

"By the hokey!" cried one of the herders, "you've started in early to be of service to us, Mr. Reade. If you hadn't come up just now with that machine, we'd a-lost the animals sure guns."

"Well, since your employer is in the syndicate," said Frank, "the best thing you can do with these fellows will be to drive them afoot to the ranch, and put them in your bosses' hands."

"Pshaw! We don't want to do that."

"Why not, I'd like to know."

"Because it isn't customary."

"Then what would you do?"

"Hold a lynching bee, of course."

"Oh, no! You must not string them up."

"Horse thieves are always hung in this State, sir."

"Granted, if true, but in this case you must do as I say."

"They're your prisoners, but our meat, Mr. Reade."

"By bringing them to the ranch, you will let your boss see that we've started in to put the gang out of the way, and then you can do as you see fit."

"That's so. We may as well hang 'em there as anywhere else. We'll do as you suggest, sir."

"Is this all of the gang?"

"I don't know; you'd better quiz the greasers."

Frank alighted and approached the big, sullen-looking leader. Sizing the rascal up a few moments, he finally asked him.

"Where's the rest of your crowd?"

"There are no more," replied the Mexican in good English.

"Oh, yes there are. You know who I am, for Domingo the Demon has told you. I have saved you from immediate death. Now if you admit the truth I shall see that you are not hung at all."

A gleam of hope sprang to the bearded rascal's dark eyes.

He shot a covert glance at his shivering companions: It was clear enough to him that unless he won Frank's favor, his doom was inevitably sealed, so he said, hesitatingly:

"Will you keep faith with me if I tell you?"

"I swear it," replied Frank.

"You have an honest look. I will trust you."

"Well—speak out—confess."

"In the cave, at Beaver Lake."

"How many men?"

"Thirty-eight and Domingo."

"Hal! The whole gang?"

"Every one of them."

"What were they doing there?"

"Waiting for us to come down with those horses. We were then going over the river into Mexico to sell them."

"See here," said Frank to the cowboys; "you heard my promise to this man. Will you spare his life for thus aiding me? His information may lead to the arrest of the whole gang."

"Of course we will," said one of the cowboys.

"Good! Then take your prisoners away. We are going for Beaver Lake and ront the thieves out of the cave."

And so saying Frank returned aboard of the prairie schooner. She was started off for the south, followed by a ringing cheer from the cowboys on a twenty-eight mile run.

Frank and his friends made preparations for a hot fight.

CHAPTER V.

THE CUNNING SNARE.

THE FURY reached the Devil's river, and as there was a clear space of ground on the eastern bank Frank resolved to follow it down to Beaver Lake.

In less than an hour the prairie schooner was in close proximity to the place she was heading for.

At this point the river ran into a deep, narrow canyon which shut out much of the silvery moonlight.

Proceeding along the bed of this gloomy pass, our friends were suddenly startled to hear a wild, piercing cry ahead.

"Help! Help!" screamed a frantic voice.

"What's that?" gasped Frank, in startled tones.

"Faix it's ther vyce av a mon," said Barney.

"Kain't see nobuddy ahead dar," Pomp remarked, looking out.

"Well," said Lasso Charley, "it's some one in trouble anyway."

Again the appealing yell pealed out.

It was certainly ahead of the electric vehicle.

"Save me! Save me!" was the frantic cry.

This time it sounded nearer.

Yet the crew of the prairie schooner saw no one.

They all were peering out.

On one side was the river and on the other the precipice walls, while ahead was a level stretch of sandy ground.

It puzzled them to account for the voice, as there was no place in view where the person who uttered the cry could hide.

Frank increased the speed of the Fury.

She had not gone ahead far when the mysterious voice cried:

"Stop! Stop! and help me."

"Where are you?" shouted Frank, cutting out the current.

"Up in this cleft in the rocks."

There was a split in the face of the wall a few feet ahead, which our friends now observed.

Grasping a rifle, Frank told Barney and Pomp to follow him, and alighting he ran toward the crevice.

Scarcely had they alighted when suddenly over a score of men, wearing slouched hats, rough suits, and armed to the teeth appeared on top of the rocks on each side of the ravine.

They instantly opened fire upon Frank and his friends.

As the shower of bullets whistled down at the three, they realized that they had been lured from cover by a trick.

The person supposed to be in distress was a mere decoy.

"Treachery!" exclaimed Frank, as a ball grazed his shoulder and inflicted a slight flesh wound.

"Who am dey?" gasped Pomp, as a bullet took his hat off.

"Be heavens, there's Domingo, the Devil!" yelled Barney.

They now knew that their opponents were the horse thieves.

Before a second volley could reach them, they sprang back to the prairie schooner, and scrambled aboard.

Just as they retreated through the door, another fusillade came down from the Mexicans, accompanied by imprecations and expletives of the most bitter and rancorous import.

The bullets rattled against the engine without creating any damage and the blinds were hastily drawn over the windows.

"Lured in a trap, eh?" asked Lasso Charley.

"The villains must have seen us coming and prepared this ambuscade to murder us," replied Frank.

"Faith, it shows as they fears us," said Barney. "Shure an' they wouldn't thry ter lay us out widout rayson if they didn't think they had us at their mercy. Now the shpalpeens sees as their shots does no damage ter this schooner an' they'll be afther showin' us more respect in ther future."

"Kain't yo' git a crack at dem wif de hydraulic guns, Marse, Frank!" wistfully asked the coon.

"Certainly I can. Hand me a projectile," said Frank.

The breech of the guns stood on a series of spiral pipes connected with the air-pump, and Frank charged them.

Opening the breech of one gun, he shoved in a cylindrical brass projectile and depressed the mechanism, throwing the muzzle up to a proper angle.

The gun bore on the gang on the rocks opposite the Fury, and Frank pulled the lever to discharge the piece.

Thud! went the released air.

Zizz-z-z! went the projectile.

Boom! it roared when it struck the rocks.

A blinding glare of fire flared up where it struck, in which was mingled the shattered rocks in a huge fountain.

The report was frightful.

An awful cry arose from the Mexicans.

Many of them were struck by the flying missiles.

Those who lived rushed away, filled with horror, and three of them who were killed came plunging down into the ravine.

Mangled beyond all recognition, they lay lifeless on the opposite shore of the river.

Frank loaded the other gun.

It was aimed up at the rocks on the side they occupied.

The horse thieves had vanished from view, but Frank quickly fired

the shot, and it roared and sent another mass of debris flying in all directions.

"That makes fifteen out of Domingo's gang, which leaves thirty-five!" cried Frank, pointing at the three corpses.

"If we're afther keepin' an at this rate," grinned Barney, "faith in three days there'll be no more av thim left than there wor av ther Kilkenny cats."

"Let us get out of this ravine," suggested the ranchman, "once those greasers reach the prairie they'll bolt, and we may have a hard time to catch them again."

"Just the plan!" assented Frank.

He sent the prairie schooner ahead some distance further when she came out on the border of the lake.

From here she was driven across the prairie, and our friends soon caught sight of some of their enemies.

The Mexicans were riding swiftly toward the south, and were then at least two leagues in advance of the Fury and riding fast.

"Dar dey am! Dar dey am!" cried Pomp, pointing out.

"It is only part of the gang," said Frank, critically.

"Ther rest av thim probably knows where ter meet 'em," said Barney.

"What's the matter with the Fury?" asked Lasso Charley, suddenly.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank. "She is slackening speed!"

"Have yez ther switch all ther way over?" asked Barney.

"Yes—to the last notch."

"Golly, dar goes de lights out!" muttered Pomp.

A troubled expression crossed Frank's face and he cast a rapid glance at the electrometer hanging on the wall.

It showed a very low voltage.

Then the truth flashed across his mind and he said:

"Why, the chemicals in the batteries are getting exhausted!"

"Bad cess to thim!" cried Barney. "It'll take an hour or more fer thim ter dissolve enough ter give us full force!"

"Am dem yere yellow niggahs gwine fo' ter 'scape us den?" the coon cried resentfully. "What yo' gwine ter do?"

"Recharge them at once to lose as little time as possible," Frank replied energetically.

By this time the speed of the Fury had slackened down to a pace that a man could have beaten afoot.

It kept gradually diminishing all the time.

Finally it stopped.

The crew of the Fury kept watching the fast receding Mexicans until they finally vanished from view in the distance.

Frank went into the rear compartment, and procuring some chemicals, he lifted a trap door in the floor.

A shallow compartment was revealed, filled with innumerable batteries joined together by insulated wires.

He put a certain amount of the chemicals in each jar and then, opening traps in the floors of the other rooms, he recharged the rest of the batteries.

They were cells of exceedingly great strength which Frank invented.

Had they been of the ordinary type, enough strength of current could not have been derived from them to propel the prairie schooner.

Unfortunately it required so much time to develop the requisite amount of current by dissolving the compound put in them that the fugitive horse thieves had a chance to escape.

Having prepared the batteries so they would operate for several days, Frank joined his companions.

Looking out the window, he saw that the Mexicans were then out of sight in the distance.

"Gone, eh?" he asked, laconically.

"Beyant bein' ketched," solemnly said Barney.

"Wha' dis accident happen now fo'?" Pomp groaned.

"They've left a trail we can follow anyhow," consolingly said Lasso Charley.

Watching the electrometer to see the current gain enough force to operate the engine, Barney took out his old fiddle and Pomp got his banjo, when an impromptu concert was struck up.

It helped to vary the monotony.

Finally our friends saw that the batteries were strong enough to move the Fury, and the electric lights began to glow again.

With their hopes revived Frank turned on the current.

Lasso Charley manned the wheel.

He was an expert trailer, and as the prairie schooner ran on he got her into the tracks of the Mexicans' horses' hoofs.

There he kept her.

The current gradually increased in strength.

Consequently the Fury proceeded with more speed.

Presently she was flying over the prairie at her customary high rate of speed, and the spirits of our friends arose.

It was clear that they were gaining on the animals in advance, and every one examined his weapons.

The trail was met by other tracks, showing that the other flank of the band had joined the one Frank was pursuing.

The trail ran along a great distance.

But suddenly an unexpected disaster occurred that called forth expressions of dismay from all.

CHAPTER VI.

LURED INTO A TRAP.

STRETCHING away for hundreds of miles before the Fury were the rippling waters of the great Rio Grande.

The mighty river cut off the advance of the prairie schooner so that she could no longer follow the Mexicans.

It was very evident that they had driven their horses into the big stream and caused them to swim across to the Mexican shore, thus gaining a place of safety.

A cry of vexation pealed from Frank's lips, and pointing down at the mighty water course, he said:

"We have had our race for nothing."

"Bedad, it's bilked we are, entoirely!" groaned Barney.

"Nor can we get over near here," added Lasso Charley.

"Whar am dey a bridge?" asked the coon of the ranchman.

"None nearer than at Painted Cave, on the other side of the San Antonio railroad," the ranchman replied.

"Then we'll head that way and get down into Mexico," said Frank.

"Which way shall I steer?"

"South-west," replied Lasso Charley. "It's fifty miles from here."

"It's a lucky thing we have you with us, so you can give us all the information we require," said Frank.

The engine rolled along, and Lasso Charley said:

"In order to get at the sunken gold I told you about we would have to get on the other side of the Rio anyway."

They finally reached the bridge and crossed over.

Returning to a point opposite where the trail of the horse thieves had been lost at the riverside, they began to search for the tracks of their enemies.

It was late on the following afternoon before they were found, and then the tracks went toward a distant copse of woodland.

The Fury followed the trail again.

Luck was against our friends, however, for when night fell a terrific storm burst as they ran into the woods and obliterated the faint tracks they had been following.

Barney brought the engine to a pause.

It was of no use going any further.

The wind was blowing such a gale that had the Fury been out on the open prairie she would have been toppled over.

It was a wild night.

The trees, rocks and shrubs protected them.

Yet all the while the storm raged it tore off branches, uprooted trees and sent them flying through the air.

The Fury was bombarded all over.

Despite the peril of their position it was safer to be where they were than in an exposed place.

"Ain't you going on?" asked Frank.

"What's ther use?" asked Barney, in disgust.

"I'm afraid we'll lose the horse thieves now."

"Upon me sowl I agree wid yer."

The night wore slowly away, the storm raging with unabated fury until the dawn of day.

It then gradually cleared away.

Pomp cooked and served an excellent breakfast, and at its end they started the Fury ahead slowly along the way they were going.

In this manner Frank expected to get through the woods.

The sun finally burst from behind the clouds.

Frank then relieved Barney of the wheel, and glancing out the window, he caught sight of a man on horseback.

The Fury was then traversing an arcade through the woods, the trees on each side being too close together to admit of the passage of the prairie schooner among them.

"Fo' de lan' sakes, who am dat?" asked Pomp, who also saw the rider.

"Looks like a Mexican," commented Frank.

The mustang bestrode by the man was going along at an easy lope, and the rider now glanced back at the Fury with a curious expression upon his features.

A ray of sunlight piercing the foliage overhead slanted down upon his dark features, distinctly revealing them.

"It's Domingo, the Demon!" cried Frank, he recognized him.

"Golly? So it am!"

"Hello!" Frank yelled at him.

"Well?" replied the bandit coolly.

"Stand!"

"Oh, no!"

"We'll fire!"

"Bah! I defy you!"

"Pomp, arm yourself!"

"Yas sah!"

The coon produced a rifle.

But Domingo the Demon dashed away.

Plunging among the trees he vanished.

A cry of disappointment escaped the coon.

"Done gone!" he exclaimed.

"Fire in the direction he went!" said Frank.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Three reports rang out.

No cry, only the echo came back.

"Mus' a miss him," said Pomp.

"How unfortunate!"

"Go like de deuce, Marse Frank!"

"What for?"

"Git froo de woods quicker'n him."

"That's so—ha!"

"Wha' de mattah?"

"There he is on the road again."

"Praise de Lawd! So he am!"

"Something must have turned him out of the woods."

"Chase him, honey! Go fo' him, chile!"

"I'll run him down now."

Frank put full speed on the engine.

Away she tore like wild fire.

A defiant yell burst from Domingo the Demon.

He waved his hand back at his pursuers.

Digging spurs into his mustang he dashed ahead.

After him flew the prairie schooner furiously.

The ground ahead was littered with the broken branches of the trees which must have been torn off by the violent storm.

They cracked and snapped loudly as the engine's wheels crushed and broke them.

Suddenly, though, when she was in the midst of a larger collection of the twigs and branches than she encountered before, they gave away beneath her, and she plunged into a deep pit.

Down she went with a terrible crash and the jingling of broken glass, throwing her occupants stunned to the floor.

The Fury landed on the bottom half buried in a mass of debris and there she laid over on her side, utterly helpless.

It was a natural pit, but the walls had been squared, and the branches and twigs had been laid across the top in order to form a trap into which Domingo had lured her.

As soon as Frank recovered it flashed across his mind that the captain of the Mexican ruffians had prepared this pitfall to destroy the prairie schooner.

Circumstances had assisted him in his evil design.

"He made that detour among the trees on his horse to avoid the trap!" he muttered. "Now I understand his scheme."

Expecting that he had not seen the last of his enemies, Frank first secured the doors and windows so no one could get in.

He then examined his companions.

They all were senseless.

Frank had a hard job to revive them.

While he was so employed he heard voices outside.

The speakers used the Mexican language, but as Frank was conversant with Spanish he understood them.

"The horse thieves, I suppose!" he muttered.

Then he heard one say:

"The plan worked well, Domingo."

"Finely, Pedro, for there she lies!"

"Isn't she ruined?"

"She certainly looks so."

"And her inmates?"

"Probably killed."

"How shall we discover?"

"By going down in the pit."

"Look out! They may be shamming."

"Trust me for caution. We will wait."

"For what, Domingo?"

"To see if there is any sign of life in her."

"Very well, senior. Let the men surround the pit."

"These people shall never molest us again."

"No, no! They must not escape alive from here."

"I shall see that they don't. They are in my power, if alive!"

Foreseeing no further trouble for the present, Frank continued his work at reviving his companions and succeeded.

As soon as they learned what happened and how the situation was, they held a consultation to devise a means of defense.

It was manifest that they were in a dangerous position.

"Arm yourselves," said Frank. "The moment any of the Mexicans come down in the pit we will be ready for them. As soon as all hands are down open fire on them."

The rest nodded assent.

Maintaining the utmost silence, they watched out the bull's-eyes and saw that the pit was at least twelve feet deep.

The Mexicans were surrounding the top.

Finally, however, as they did not see any sign of Frank or the others, they began to let down tree trunks.

When several of them rested against the side of the pit a dozen of the horse thieves climbed down.

Among them was Domingo the Demon, and all were armed and on the alert for a fight with our friends.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEN IN THE RIVER.

"Now, boys, give it to them!"

Four shots followed Frank's order.

Every one of them struck a man, who screamed and fell.

The Mexicans had started to approach the Fury, but as soon as the shots were heard the rest rushed back to the tree trunks to get out of the pit.

"Again!" cried Frank.

Four more shots followed.

And four more of the natives bit the dust.

The others were so terrified by this unexpected fusillade that they got out of the pitfall before Frank's party could get a shot at them.

"We must keep the ball rolling now that we've commenced," said Frank. "There's only one way for us to get out of here."

As he spoke he loaded the hydraulic guns.

They were aimed at the wall of the pit ahead and fired. A tremendous mass of the dirt was blown away. "Barney, you work one gun, and I'll operate the other!" cried Frank.

"Is it ter pieces ye wud blow ther wall?" questioned the Irishman. "Yes. We must batter it, down to get the Fury out."

"Let her go, me bye!"

And two more shots flew out.

More of the dirt was sent flying.

These reports drove the horse thieves away.

Several more shots were discharged.

By this time a wide opening was made.

It ran up to the level ground at a slant.

Seeing that the prairie schooner could run up the incline and reach the upper ground, Frank now said:

"All of you put on your metal suits, and we will go outside and throw the logs out of the way of the wheels."

This order was carried out.

The suits in question were made of thick steel scales that were perfectly bullet proof, and fit their bodies snugly.

Reaching the outside, Frank made a quick examination of the electric machine.

Nothing but the glasses were broken, and he saw that she was in fit condition to make the effort to drag herself out of the trap.

The strong, flexible springs had saved her from demolition when she fell down into the pit.

Working like beavers, Barney, Pomp and Lasso Charley cleared a way to the breach they had made in the wall.

Frank then strode over toward the bandits they hit.

He found them all alive.

They were groaning and swearing furiously.

As soon as they saw him they drew their pistols.

A volley of shots struck the young inventor on all sides.

The metal suit protected his body from injury, and seeing that the wounded rascals could do him considerable injury if left to do as they pleased, he began to bind them with strips torn from the red sashes they wore round their waists.

Some of them resisted him.

He brought them to terms by threatening to kill them.

By the time Frank had them all bound, his friends had their work finished, and he called them.

"Put these fellows on board the engine!"

Four of the horse thieves were stowed in the store room.

Returning for the others they saw Domingo the Demon and his gang up on the level ground aiming their rifles down at them, and Frank shouted:

"If you fire you'll kill your friends!"

"May de fiend roasta you!" roared the bandit chief.

"Shield yourselves with the prisoners, boys!" Frank said to his friends.

This was done, and they retreated to the prairie schooner, the Mexicans not caring to fire for fear of hitting their friends.

Once they had the whole crowd in the engine Frank remarked:

"That makes twenty-three of the gang we've got the best of."

"Faith, Domingher ther Devil has but twenty-seven left then."

"D'yo' want me fo' ter start de Fury?" asked Pomp.

"Yes—yes—go ahead!" Frank answered.

Obediently the coon pulled the switch over, the electric circuit was made and the wheels began to revolve.

The prairie schooner rolled into the opening made by the gun and forced her way up to the level ground.

By the time she reached it, the Mexicans had vanished.

Pomp kept her going.

She passed out of the woods.

Nothing was seen of Domingo's gang.

They had vanished as if they had melted away.

"Make a circuit of the woods, Pomp," said the inventor.

"Whar dem yere scallawags gwine?" questioned the coon.

"That's just what I want to discover."

"I'm sure they wouldn't remain in the woods," said Lasso Charley.

"They know better than to do that."

They took off their metal suits as the schooner ran on, and put things in order, for her fall down into the pit had thrown everything out of place.

Many things had been smashed to pieces.

The prisoners begged of them to bandage their wounds.

They readily consented to do this, and new plates of glass were put in where they had been broken.

Within an hour the interior of the Fury resumed its former appearance, and a circuit of the woods had been made.

But they failed to see Domingo's gang.

When they reached the vicinity of the place they started from, a troop of U. S. cavalry was seen heading toward Painted Cave.

There was a score of the mounted soldiers.

As soon as Frank beheld them he said to Pomp:

"Run up to them, and we can send our prisoners over the border in their care."

"Jes' de plan!" chuckled the coon, complying.

The soldiers had seen the electric vehicle, and reined in their steeds until it drew close to them.

Frank then shouted out the window:

"I wish to ask a favor of you, gentlemen."

"Speak!" was the captain's reply.

"We are engaged at breaking of a gang of horse thieves with this electric prairie schooner, and have captured eight of them."

"Do you mean Domingo the Demon's gang?"

"Yes. We want our prisoners locked up until we finish our work. Are you willing to take them?"

"We are bound for Fort Lancaster on the Pecos river."

"Couldn't you keep them there?"

"Yes. But have you any authority to take them?"

"I have an arrest warrant for the gang from the Governor of Texas."

"Good! That is sufficient. Let us have your prisoners."

"Take them out, boys," said Frank to his friends.

The Irishman and the coon obeyed.

Putting the furious Mexicans in the hands of the troops, Frank showed them the warrant and gave an account of the Fury and his mission.

The prisoners were each mounted with a soldier.

Bidding Frank adieu, the soldiers rode off.

When they were gone the inventor said to Lasso Charley:

"There! We are rid of them now!"

"What's the next move?"

"To find the stronghold of the thieves."

"I can guide you to it."

"Where shall we go?"

"Toward the Sierra del Carmen Mountains."

"Are they in the hills?"

"No. We must go on toward San Carlos."

"In the neighborhood where the four drags of gold are sunk?"

"Yes. The thieves have a stronghold near there."

"Why do you think they'll go back there now?"

"Because they have seen me and will suspect that I'll make an effort to get away with the gold they so vainly have sought for."

"I see. That neighborhood contains a big prairie, don't it?"

"Yes. The Llano of Chilicote."

Following the course of the Rio Grande, the Fury ran along to the westward rapidly through a zone of malarial fevers and black vomit.

The diversified scenery was made up of forests of mahogany and rosewood, sarsaparilla and vanilla plants, india-rubber and capal trees, tropical fruits and the magney.

From this tree, pulque, the national drink is made, while it also yields thread, paper, oakum hammocks, the leaves are used to feed cattle, the roots are a substitute for soap, while in ancient days the thorns terminating the gigantic leaves were used for pins, needles and nails.

Here and there the coarse stubble of the plains was broken by huge thick and prickly leaved cactus bushes of a dull pea green color dotted with beautiful crimson flowers.

The plains swarmed with wolves, coyotes, and bison; the woods were alive with monkeys, mocking-birds, brilliant colored parrots, trogons, and humming-birds, and among the rocks they saw many heloderms, tapirs, jaguars, bears, sloths and ocelots.

On the following morning they arrived near San Carlos, and were speeding along the shore of the river, when Frank's attention was suddenly directed toward the water.

He there perceived a number of horses' heads rising above the surface, and the submerged bodies of several Mexicans.

It was evident that the natives each bestrode a horse and were leading the rest by tethers in a swim over the water.

The young inventor sent the engine flying toward them.

"Horse thieves!" he shouted.

Into the turret rushed his friends.

They saw what was going on.

"Gwine ter head 'em off?" asked Pomp.

"Yes. We must get there ere they reach the shore."

"Hurrah! It's in our power they bees, bad luk to thim!"

"Get your weapons ready!"

Into the store-room sped the others, and the Fury dashed up to that part of the shore toward which the men in the river were heading and came to a sudden pause.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEVEN TRAITORS.

"HANDS up, gentlemen, or you perish!"

Frank had flung open the turret window and shouted this in Spanish.

The Mexicans in the river were startled.

"Stop! Don't fire!" they yelled.

An ironical smile crossed Frank's face.

His companions had their pneumatic rifles out the loopholes.

Every one of the Mexicans saw the weapons and turned very pale.

They realized that they were at Frank's mercy.

"Come ashore and give us an account of those horses."

"Ave Maria! They belong to us!" cried the terrified greaser.

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, we are the vaqueros of a hidalgo a few miles from here."

"Come ashore and let us prove it, sir."

"By the Virgin! you may shoot us."

"Not if we find you are honest men."

Reluctantly the seven Mexicans steered their horses ashore.

It looked to Frank as if they contemplated treachery of some kind for they had sullen looks upon their dark faces, and rapidly spoke to each other in a local dialect.

"Dismount!" ordered the inventor, as the horses came ashore. The Mexicans did not obey. On the contrary they released the animals they were leading, dug spurs in the flanks of their mounts and sped away.

"Fire upon their horses!" cried Frank.

His companions carried out this wise plan, and in a few moments the animals were all down.

"Lasso Charley, secure the beasts in the river."

The ranchman sprang to the ground to comply, and Frank turned the engine around and sent her up to the fallen men.

"Hands up, I told you!" he shouted, angrily.

"Mercy! Mercy!" howled the alarmed Mexicans.

They all fell on their knees in front of the prairie schooner, and raised their hands up over their heads abjectly.

"Secure them, boys!" cried Frank.

Out rushed Barney and Pomp, armed with ropes, and working swiftly, they soon had the seven men secured.

"March them back to the river!" said Frank.

This was done promptly.

Lasso Charley had hauled the horses ashore.

There were thirty-five head of them, and all good ones.

"All branded!" sententiously said Lasso Charley.

"Can you recognize them by the marks?" asked Frank.

"I ought to, as they are from Mr. Goodwin's ranch."

"You don't say so. Look at these vaqueros."

The ranchman complied, and an amazed expression swept over his face as he recognized the prisoners.

It was manifest that they knew him, too, for as soon as they observed who he was, they looked more terrified than ever.

"*Por mi madre!* It is Lasso Charley, the superintendent!" cried one.

"That settles it!" despairingly added another.

"Do you recognize them?" Frank asked, curiously.

"Why, they are some of our own cowboys."

"Robbing their employer, eh?"

"It looks suspiciously that way."

"Question them."

"I can't speak their lingo."

"Then I will."

The Mexicans were the picture of despair over their unexpected capture.

They kept conversing excitedly in their dialect so Frank could not understand what they said for a few moments, plotting a means of getting out of the ugly scrape they were in.

Finally one of them turned to the inventor, and said:

"We were overjoyed to see that Lasso Charley is with you."

"Why?" demanded Frank.

"Because we at first imagined you were bandits."

"Indeed! What led you to suppose so?"

"Your threatening attitude toward us."

"Remember, you lied to me about who you were."

"That was done to protect ourselves from robbery."

"How do you account for your presence over the border with those horses?"

"Very easily. A gang of thieves tried to get the animals, and to save them we brought the herd here, and swam them over the river."

"We don't believe that yarn."

"Heavens! How can you doubt us?"

"We have very good reasons for doing so."

"But you grossly wrong us, senor."

"Oh, I think not. I'll get at the bottom of this work. Wait!"

Frank went into the store-room, calling Pomp after him.

And securing one end of a copper wire to the batteries he brought the other end out, and whispered some instructions to the coon.

Binding the end of the wire around the neck of the Mexican to whom he had been speaking, he said to the wondering man:

"Do you know what this means?"

"No, senor," was the reply.

"That machine runs by electricity."

"You amaze me!"

"The punishment of horse stealing is death."

"I am aware of it, senor."

"Now this wire is fastened to a powerful electric battery."

"Do you mean to say—"

"I mean to say that if you do not instantly confess the truth about these horses I shall electrocute you!"

Upon hearing this dreadful threat the Mexican began to shiver and shake and burst into a cold sweat.

He had heard what a deadly element electricity was.

Frank saw him weaken.

It satisfied him that the man would soon confess.

To hasten the crisis he said:

"I am going to have a slow current put into your body. Every moment it shall increase in strength until 1,700 volts strike you dead where you stand. The sooner you speak the better off you will be, my man!"

"Don't murder me!" screamed the man.

"Your life is in your own hands."

"Release me."

"Not until you admit the truth, or die."

Saying which Frank motioned to Pomp who was in the turret.

The coon turned a slight current into the wire, and a yell of alarm escaped the vaquero.

He did not stand it long.

"I'll speak—I'll speak!" he yelled.

"Pomp, cut out the current."

"Yas, sah."

"Now, sir, what were you doing with those animals?"

"Will you spare my life if I admit the truth?"

"Most decidedly I shall."

"Then I'll confess. We were taking them to Domingo the Demon."

"Are you members of his band?"

"No, sir. He would have paid us half what he got for them."

"Did you ever do this kind of work before?"

"Once—only once, senor."

"Where was you to find the horse thief?"

"At a place near San Carlos."

"Describe the place."

"His band is located near the river. At the back of the rocks where they dwell in a cavern is a large inclosure, wherein the stolen animals are kept until disposed of."

"Will you guide us to the place?"

"Most willingly, if you will protect me."

"I shall see to that. Later I shall question you more," said Frank, unbinding the wire from his neck. "Now get aboard of the prairie schooner with your companions, and we will set out for the rendezvous of the horse thieves."

The seven traitors complied.

Locking them in the storeroom, Frank returned to his friends and aided them to string the stolen horses on a line.

When this was done the journey was resumed to Presidio, a small town on the shore of the river.

Here Lasso Charley met a Mexican with whom he was acquainted and hired him to take charge of the prisoners and the stolen horses.

Having pumped all the information they could get from the man who confessed, the prisoners and horses were ferried over the river, and then set out for Goodwin's ranch on the Slano Estacado, or Staked Plain.

The electric machine continued on to San Carlos.

It was midnight when they passed the village and headed for the stronghold of Domingo, the Demon.

The place was soon reached.

An entrance to the rocky cavern was made through a gulch at the head of which the opening in the rocks was to be found.

Frank had both hydraulic guns in readiness and his three friends armed when he boldly sent the Fury into the Gulch.

It was a rough, stony place.

As little noise was made as possible.

Half way up the pass there sounded the crack of a rifle.

The ball whistled up to the Fury and struck her headlight.

It smashed the carbons, putting out the light, and the gulch at once became wrapped in a dense gloom.

That increased the difficulty of their task.

"We are seen by a sentry!" cried Frank.

"Fo' de lub ob Hebbin doan' yo' turn back!" cried Pomp.

"I don't intend to," answered the inventor.

"There goes the greaser who foired!" exclaimed Barney.

He pointed up the gulch at the figure of a man who was dimly seen running along in advance of the Fury.

A moment afterward a babel of excited voices was heard.

Then a crowd of Mexicans were seen swarming over the ledges on each side of the gulch.

As the prairie schooner dashed up to them, instead of using rifles or pistols to repel her, the Mexicans let drive a number of dynamite bombs with which they had provided themselves.

They burst around the Fury with thunderous reports.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE RIVER.

FRANK and his companions were very much startled to find that the horse thieves had provided themselves with such dangerous missiles, for while ordinary weapons were harmless to the Fury, the terrible bombs threatened to blow her to pieces.

They burst with loud detonations all around the machine.

Rocks were split to fragments, and one of the bombs that struck a front wheel smashed it into a thousand pieces and tore the cowcatcher off.

Disabled the front of the engine toppled over.

She came to a pause and Frank stopped the machinery.

"Crippled! We can go no further!" he cried.

"My Lawd!" groaned Pomp. "Dis am drefful!"

"Here comes more of the bombs!" shouted Lasso Charley.

It seemed as if the machine would be torn to pieces, for one of the explosives burst on the platform outside, ripped it into fragments and broke a hole in the side.

Another one sent a shower of broken stones flying against the prairie schooner, like a bombardment of rifle bullets.

Unless this destructive fire were instantly stopped, Frank knew that their doom was sealed.

He sprang to the hydraulic guns.

Aiming one at a crowd on the ledge upon the right hand side, he fired, and the projectile burst among them.

Many of the thieves were seriously wounded by the appalling shot, and the ones across the gulch took fright and started to run away, when the other gun was fired at them.

It created frightful havoc in their midst.

The discharge of bombs was stopped at once.

Those of the gang who managed to get away were followed by a volley of rifle shots from Barney, Pomp and Lasso Charley.

Frank reloaded the hydraulic guns.

He could not move the prairie schooner now.

She was utterly helpless.

They waited for a second attack.

Nearly an hour passed by, when from up on top of the precipices of the gulch, towering above the Fury, there sounded the sharp spiteful cracks of a number of rifle shots.

A rain of bullets came down on the roof, and as great force was added to the cartridges by the enormous height they came from, several pierced the metal covering.

They were tin and iron balls.

Had they been lead, they would have flattened against the metal plates.

Fortunately none of the inmates of the Fury were struck, but they were aroused to a sense of new danger.

"Howly beans!" Barney roared. "D'yer moind that?"

"They may drap us yet!" muttered Lasso Charley.

"Put on de suits ob armor!" Pomp suggested.

"Wait!" admonished Frank. "I will fix them!"

He elevated the muzzles of the guns.

First one was fired, and then the other.

Several cries of woe came back from above.

It showed them that the shots were not wasted.

"I don't believe they have any bombs left," said Frank, as he reloaded the guns. "If they had they would have used them."

Several hours passed quietly by.

Toward daybreak some more shots came down, but the guns were instantly fired at the location they came from, and that put an end to the long, weary siege our friends had been standing.

With the dawn of morning, the inmates of the Fury partook of a hasty breakfast and then left the engine.

An examination showed them the extent of the damage.

By the greatest good luck the axle of the broken wheel was found to be intact, and Frank said:

"I have two odd wheels in sections on board, and I will have her in running order in two hours."

"How lucky!" cried Lasso Charley, in delighted tones.

"Yo' specs dem fieves gwine ter come back?" asked Pomp.

"I doubt if they will," replied Frank. "Let's get to work."

The sectional wheel was taken out and adjusted.

Within a short time the prairie schooner was in running order, and a new plate was riveted over the hole in the side.

It was impossible to fix the broken platform.

Frank then started the Fury.

She had not gone far up the gulch when the voices of several men yelling to them in Spanish were heard.

Frank glanced out.

He saw four dead men.

Among them were three others alive.

They were the victims of the hydraulic gun, who had been on the ledges the previous night hurling bombs at the Fury.

"They want help," said Frank to his friends.

"Begorra, it's aboard we'll bring them," said Barney.

"Go on, Irish, an' I'll help yo'," said Pomp, waving his hand.

They alighted and approached the men.

Not understanding what they said, they wasted no time, but seeing that their wounds were not necessarily fatal, they hustled them unceremoniously over to the Fury.

They were taken aboard and shackled.

Frank questioned them.

He could not elicit any information however.

They professed ignorance of Domingo the Demon's movements and were finally locked up in the store-room.

Proceeding on, the schooner finally reached the cavern.

It had an opening running straight through it, the entrance being on the gulch, and the exit in the big inclosure in which the horse thieves corralled the animals they stole.

The interior of the cavern was in disorder, looking as if its occupants had made a hurried exit.

Upon the floor were the still smoldering embers of a fire, there were boxes that contained clothing and other things overturned as if the owners had hastily snatched up the most valuable contents, and at one side were a large number of cooking utensils.

A number of grass hammocks were slung in the corners, and the floor was strewn with bridles, saddles and other things of a similar nature used by people accustomed to handling horses.

None of the Mexicans were there, though.

Nor was a horse to be seen about the place.

The Fury ran out into the stockade, and made a tour of the place, but no sign of their enemies was seen.

Not to lose any time, Frank drove the prairie schooner out through the gulch again.

A hunt for the thieves was begun.

It lasted over a space of two weeks.

But the rascals were so safely hidden that they were not found.

Domingo the Demon then had but twenty men left of his band, for the last ones captured were sent over the border to join the Mexicans sent to Fort Lancaster.

One morning Frank turned to Lasso Charley and said:

"Suppose we go in search of the sunken gold?"

"We won't have far to go from here," replied the ranchman.

"There don't seem to be much chance of finding Domingo's gang,

and as we have plenty time on our hands, we might as well take advantage of it as to waste it on a useless hunt."

"Bedad, it's my idee that if we kapes shady awhoile," said Barney in thoughtful tones, "thim spalpeens will show their mugs thinkin' we've give 'em up, d'ye moind."

"I've got my idee ob dem," said Pomp.

"What is that?" queried Frank, interestedly.

"Specs dey's changed dar base."

"I don't understand your meaning."

"Why," said the coon, "dey know dat we'se lookin' fo' dem roun' dese yere parts, honey, an' dey ain't sich fools as ter stay whiar dey's gwine ter git cotched, am dey?"

"You think they are operating another section along the border?"

"Fo' shuah. Dat's it, prezackly, Marse Frank."

"Do you know I quite agree with you. But where are they?"

"If Pomp's impression is correct," said Lasso Charley, "you can depend that they have not gone to the eastward."

"Why not?"

"The river is too broad and deep there to get cattle over easily."

"Then we must look for them further westward."

"I think so. They only haunt the shallow waters."

"Your idea is very practical. I agree with you, too."

"Be afther directin' me," said Barney, to the ranchman.

"Steer along the shore toward Cuchillo Parade, and we will run up along the Concho river."

The Irishman did as he was bade.

In the afternoon they reached the junction of the Concho with the Rio Grande, and came out on a broad, flat shore.

"This is the place where we dragged the gold into the Rio," said Lasso Charley. "Stop her, Barney."

"Is this the exact place?" asked Frank.

"Yes, the gold lies about fifty feet out from shore."

"Did you dive to see if it was there?"

"No, I had a skiff and a long pole."

"I'll put on a diving suit and go out and see."

Frank donned a rubber suit with a copper helmet, and after fastening an air hose to a pump, he secured the other end to the helmet.

Barney and Pomp operated the wheels of the pump.

Frank had attached weights to his soles, and walking out into the river he waded ahead, getting deeper every moment.

In a short time he was completely submerged.

Beneath the water it was rather dark and gloomy, a yellow, muddy tinge riling it considerably.

Looking out through the bull's-eye in his helmet, Frank scanned the bottom ahead.

The mud underfoot was very thick and tenacious.

On he went, the sunlight dimly lighting up the bed of the river, and he soon reached the distance from shore that Lasso Charley had mentioned.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED ATTACK.

SCARCELY had Frank reached the place in the river where the sunken gold was supposed to be when Barney stopped pumping.

It was intensely hot and the exertion of turning the wheel was so great that both the coon and the Irishman were in a profuse sweat.

A mischievous plan had entered the Celt's mind to play a practical joke, but it afterward transpired, as will be seen, that it led to a most startling result, to the interest of all parties concerned.

Trying as the work had been for two men, it was now twice as hard for the ducky to operate the wheels alone.

He glanced up at Barney in astonishment and saw him grinning.

"Say!" he panted. "Ketch hol' dar, chile!"

"Is it dhramin' yez are?" coolly asked the Irishman.

"Ain't yo' gwine ter help me?"

"Associate mesilf wid a naygur? Niver!"

"But—gosh blame it, I kain't do dis alone."

"If yez shtop Masther Frank doys!"

"Lan' ob Goshen! I know dat."

"Then work away, ye sun dhroied chimpanzee!"

"I'se tired an' sweatin' drefful!" groaned the coon, grinding away.

"Shure, it's as cool as a cucumber I'm gettin', me buck."

"Ain't yo' gwine ter wuck?"

"Divil a bit," replied Barney, sitting down on a rock.

"Gwine ter make me do it all alone?"

"What do I hoire yez for—a ornamin'?"

Pomp groaned.

He saw through Barney's little joke.

And it made him feel very weary.

Yet he dared not stop an instant or Frank might perish.

Glaring at the grinning Celt, he yelled furiously:

"Yo' jes' wait'll I git froo! I'se gwine ter chaw yer heart out!"

"Faith it's a cannibal yez bes entoirely! Work faster, yer moon-faced monstrosity, or I'll lick yer!"

Pomp ground away, and the perspiration drenched his clothes and trickled down his ebony face in streams.

Barney calmly watched him working awhile, and then arose.

"I'll be afther gittin' a shtick an' tickle his breeches wid ther same wanst he shlacks his work," he muttered.

"Hey! Come back heah!" yelled Pomp as he strolled away.

"It's a dhreadful aversion I have av citizens from Timbuctoo," said Barney, loftily. "Faix, I kin take me meals beside a broth av a pig, but be heavens, it's ashkin' too mooch av me arishto-

cratic blood ter harness me ter ther soide av a buck nagur wid a summer affluyium about him so shtrong that it wud knock down a brick house!"

"Lord amassy! doan' yo' see I'se neah dead?"

"More's ther pity I have no insurance on yer loife!"

"Barney, if dis chile done fall, played out, an' Marse Frank he die, yo' be ter blame!" threatened the coon in an effort to scare him.

"I belave yer," calmly replied Barney, grinning harder than ever, for the woful look on Pomp's black mug was too comical for him to stand.

"Doan' be mean, Barney," pleaded the coon.

"Shure, I couldn't if I tried," confessed Barney.

He plunged in among the bushes to get a stick as he spoke.

And he plunged into something else.

It was a man.

A Mexican.

He laid in the bushes.

And had been watching our friends.

He uttered a savage expletive as Barney stumbled over him.

The next moment the Celt fell to the ground.

The Mexican sprang on top of him.

His sinuous fingers grasped Barney by the wind pipe.

Kneeling on top of the astonished Irishman, he held him down to the ground, and pulled a dagger from his sash.

A thrill of dismay shot through the Celt when he saw what was going on, and he instantly began to struggle.

To cry out was utterly impossible.

The clutch of the Mexican's hand on his throat was like a vise.

"I'm kilt!" muttered Barney, hoarsely.

He saw that the man was one of Domingo the Demon's gang who had been spying upon them.

Observing the deadly blade raised to be buried in his body, he suddenly seized the Mexican by the wrist.

In this manner he saved his life.

Summoning all his strength he suddenly drew up his legs, straddled the Mexican's neck, and pulled his head back.

The Irishman had caught the Mexican by the throat with his leg, back of the knee, and locking the foot of that leg back of the knee of his other leg, he had a powerful leverage.

Back went the Mexican's head slowly but surely, and his grip on the Irishman's throat relaxed.

"Help! Lasso Charley—quick—this way!" yelled Barney.

The ranchman had been doing sentry duty.

He heard Barney's cry.

Rushing from the Fury he saw the struggle.

Up to them he dashed, and doubling up his fist he struck the Mexican a blow in the face that half stunned him.

Over fell the man in a heap.

Up sprang Barney.

In a moment he disarmed the man.

Hardly had this been done when a distant pistol shot was heard, and a ball whistled by the Irishman's ears.

Looking in the direction it came from he beheld a number of Mexicans rushing through the bushes toward them.

"An attack, bedad!" he cried.

"Don't let this man escape!" gasped Lasso Charley.

"Faix, what kin we do?"

"Grab him, and help me carry him on the engine."

The Mexican tried to resist.

It was useless, however.

They seized him bodily.

Away they ran to the prairie schooner with him and put him in.

"Guard him, Barney. If he tries to get away, shoot him!"

"Be heavens, he's a dead man if he boodges!"

"Hey, Pomp!"

"Wha' de mattah?"

"Haul Reade ashore!"

As Lasso Charley said this, he turned the Fury.

The next moment he fired the left gun toward the Mexicans.

As the projectile roared out Pomp ceased pumping, and grasping the hose attached to Frank's helmet, he pulled it in.

It parted under water.

Frank felt the cessation of air, the jerk, and influx of water.

Hastily pulling off his shoe weights while holding his breath, he moved his hands and legs and rose to the surface.

Here he got some air through the hose hole.

It was barely sufficient to support life.

Gasping and choking, he swam to shoal water.

Here he paused and hastily took off his helmet with the aid of Pomp, who had rushed to his assistance.

The first breath of air revived him.

He then saw what was transpiring.

"De Mexicans am comin'!" gasped Pomp.

"I see. Was you hauling me ashore?" Frank replied.

"Yas, sah. Lasso Charley done fire de gun at dem!"

"Where's Barney?"

"Brung a spy in de schooner."

They both reached the shore and ran for the Fury.

The shot fired by the ranchman had brought the thieves to a pause, and caused them to retreat.

When they got into the Fury, they assisted Barney to bind the captive, and Frank then hastened into the turret.

"Can you see them?" he asked, eagerly.

"Not now," replied the ranchman.

"I'll charge on them."

"They were in the shrubbery near yonder rocks."

Frank nodded and turned the starting switch.

Away dashed the prairie schooner toward the spot where the horse thieves had last been seen.

She flew through the shrubbery, sadly in need of her pilot, and passing the rocks, finally reached the open ground.

But Domingo's men had fled.

They were mounted on horseback, and were seen speeding away over a rough rocky piece of ground, several leagues in extent, through which the machine could not follow them.

Frank observed that they must come out on the prairie.

It looked as if there were a score of the wild riders, and they were going at breakneck speed.

"I'm going to follow them!" announced Frank.

"But the schooner won't go through those rocks."

"No, but she can keep along the margin. Those scoundrels will have to come out on clear ground. Then we will have them."

"Specs dey know whar de gold am now," said Pomp.

"Yes; no doubt. We can't leave this place long, for during our absence they could get back here and fish it up."

"Then you are satisfied it's here?" queried Lasso Charley.

"Yes, for I saw it just as Pomp pulled me out."

"Perfectly intact?"

"There were four rude boxes made of saplings lashed together half buried in the mud," said Frank, "and they were filled with lumps of gold just as you described."

"Then you are satisfied I told the truth?"

"Decidedly so. We will return and get it."

The Fury ran along the border of the rocky ground and our friends kept the fugitives in view.

Gaining upon them, the Fury was but a league behind when the Mexicans reached the prairie.

Once on the open ground the horse thieves looked back and saw the electrical engine in hot pursuit.

It rendered them desperate, for it was gaining, and they lashed their horses and rode like the wind to escape the Fury.

CHAPTER XI.

SECURING THE TREASURE.

The wind was blowing in the faces of our friends very strongly as they raced along in pursuit of the Mexicans.

Along the engine sped at a tremendous pace, and she was rapidly coming up with the horse thieves, when, to Frank's surprise, he saw them spread out in a long line and pause.

Then they dismounted from their panting steeds.

A moment afterward each one of them had plucked a handful of the long, dry prairie grass and ignited it.

They touched the flames to the ground,

A long line of fire sprang up.

The wind fanned it into a roaring blaze.

In a few moments a large tract was afire.

"They've fired the prairie!" cried Frank.

He stopped the Fury.

The fire was rushing toward her.

All the Mexicans were to the windward of it.

With startling rapidity the fire spread and rose in great waves.

Soon it was roaring redly very high in the air, sending vast clouds of smoke to the sky filled with sparks.

The wind was driving the deadly element swiftly toward the Fury, and it threatened soon to engulf her.

An appalling heat came from the flames.

Once those fiery tongues reached the engine, she was doomed.

Frank turned her around, and sent her flying away as fast as the batteries could drive her.

"They've got the best of us!" he cried in disgust.

"Shure they've saved their necks!" Barney muttered.

"They're safe on the other side of that wall of flame," said Lasso Charley. "It's an old trick. The wonder is they didn't do it sooner."

"Marse Frank bettah head fo' de rocky groun' dat dey went froo. De ain't no grass dar ter bu'n, an' de fire am boun' ter stop dar," said Pomp, in anxious tones.

"That's just the place I'm heading for," Frank replied.

The engine was making thirty miles an hour now.

The flames sped along faster than the Fury was traveling, licking up the dried grass like chaff in a gale.

It left a dark burnt tract behind, glowing with a fiery brilliancy, and leaving hundreds of birds and ground animals lying dead in its midst.

It was a wild race for life.

But the Fury reached the rocks first.

Fierce gusts of hot air swept up to her.

She ran in among the boulders, bumping and tossing at every foot she advanced into the bleak arid region.

Catching sight of a mass of high rocks, Frank brought the Fury to a pause behind them.

An appalling wave of fire swept around the rock.

The heated air made Frank and his friends gasp for breath, but the fire suddenly died out as there was no more fuel there.

It burned away north and south, and devoured everything inflammable that stood in its way.

"That's the end of it!" muttered Frank.

"If it hadn't been for the rocky ground, we would not have escaped it!" exclaimed Lasso Charley.

"Gwine ter stay yere?" questioned the coon.

"Only long enough to let the wind blow the heat away."

"Faix there's no catchin' thim hoorse thaves now," said Barney.

"Well, we can return to the river, and finish our work there."

In an hour they left the shelter of the rocks.

Running out on the charred and blackened ground in which considerable heat yet remained, they sped off toward the Rio Grande again.

In due time they reached the river.

As there was not much chance of the outlaws molesting them in a hurry, Frank put on his diving suit again.

He gave his companions some instructions.

A rope was rigged to a block fastened to a rock, and one end tied to the Fury's hind axle.

Frank took the other end to which a hook was spliced into the river with him, while Barney and Lasso Charley worked the pumps.

Two wires had been fastened to the batteries, the other ends secured to the headlight which was detached from the turret, and Frank carried it under the river with him.

It illuminated the water brilliantly.

There were hundreds of fresh water fishes swimming around him in the muddy liquid, that fled at his approach.

From shore the bottom gradually shelved downward.

It was covered with stones and thick oozy mud.

Within a few moments the young inventor arrived close to a high ridge of mud, encasing four big clumsy boxes.

There was a layer of the mud covering the tops from out of which projected the jagged edges of the golden nuggets.

Fastened to the bottom of each box were two long poles which had once answered for shafts and ground rests.

Frank selected one pair of these poles.

He then fastened the line to them.

Shaking his air hose as a signal to his friends, the coon was instructed to start the prairie schooner ahead.

As soon as this was done the rope straightened out, there came a strain upon it, and the box was dragged from the mud in toward the shore, stirring up the ooze.

It fogged the water.

But the box was pulled ashore.

Frank followed it.

Passing through the water had washed the mud from the gold, and the moment the others saw it, they gave vent to expressions of profound delight.

"Bedad, it's a foortune we has," cried Barney.

"How's that for a treasure, Reade?" asked Lasso Charley.

"Golly!" shouted Pomp. "No wondah de outlaws want dat stuff!"

"The quicker we get it aboard the better," said Frank.

"Will the Fury carry it all?"

"Very easily," answered Frank. "I'll secure the other boxes now."

He took the hook off the rude box.

Returning to the river he secured the rest, one after another, until they were all pulled out of the river.

The diving suit and the tackle were stowed away.

Then they packed the gold in the vehicle and soon had the satisfaction of having it all safely stowed away.

"Now to cross the Concho river," said Frank, "and run up to Ciudad Juarez, from where we can cross to El Paso. There we can send the gold to Austin in Texas by the Southern Pacific Railroad and sell it. One of you can attend to that part."

They then sent the engine to the Concho.

A flatboat ferry was found at Cuchillo Parado, and the Fury was taken across the river.

She had a long run along the Rio Grande after that and finally arrived at Ciudad Juarez.

Crossing a bridge to El Paso, the four procured half a dozen large boxes and stowed the gold in them without letting anybody know what they contained.

Lots were drawn to see who should accompany the nuggets and sell them, and the choice fell to Lasso Charley.

Accordingly, they made arrangements to meet him again, and the gold having been put on the cars he parted with our friends and went away with it.

The plan for the prairie schooner was to run back over the desert as far as Vado de Piedras, and scour the country in quest of the Mexican horse thieves.

"They will not go over the border so frequently now that they know we are after them, and have such a dangerous war engine for them to tackle," said Frank to his two friends, as they started for the bridge that night.

"Shure, an' that greaser is wan av ther most reckless an' darin' av his nation that iver I see," Barney replied. "Although it's the dhread he has av ther Fury, yet he do seem ter have but little fear in ther composition av his blackguard nature."

"Ef we could only git dat man in our power," Pomp added, "de res' ob dem would quit fo' shuah. But he am as slippery as a eel, an' I dunno how we'se gwine ter catch him."

"There goes a drove of cows and horses now," said Frank, pointing out at the road ahead. "Perhaps the cowboys who have charge of them, may have seen something of the outlaws. I'm going to run up to them and find out."

"Hull on, dar!" interposed Pomp, suddenly.

"What's the matter now?"

"See what dey am doin', sah!"

Frank saw several more of the drovers come up on mustangs, and joining the others, they corralled the animals near the river.

Leaving one man to watch them, the rest, ten in number, hastily rode away along the stream.

They seemed to pick out the most unfrequented roads in such a careful manner, that Frank's suspicions were aroused.

"That's queer!" he remarked, in puzzled tones. "What have they left the animals there for, and gone away in such a sneaky way?"

"S'posen yez follies 'em?" suggested Barney.

"I shall," Frank replied.

He sent the prairie schooner off in the direction taken by the riders and pursued them unseen for some time.

They proceeded straight toward a ranch on the outskirts of El Paso and made a bee line for the stockades.

Frank had stopped the Fury in a small park of trees, and from this place of concealment observed all their actions.

A few minutes later, to the astonishment of the inventor, the cattle drivers came dashing from the stockade, each man leading a horse that did not belong to him.

As they dashed away the owners of the animals came running from the ranch on foot and began to fire at them.

The raiders were evidently thieves, and the owners of the animals could not pursue them to recover their property as they had no horses left to ride.

CHAPTER XII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"By heavens, there's a raid on a ranch now!" cried Frank.

"Who, by ther hookey, would a-thought that wuz their game?"

"My Lord, chillen, looker dem yere ranch owners firin' at dem!"

"Not one of their shots can hit the thieves."

"D'yer moind, they're roonin' back ther way they kem?"

"Why, dey'se gwine ter run 'em ober de bridge wif de cattle."

"Pomp has solved the mystery," said Frank. "They must intend to mix up the horses with the cattle to avoid observation, and thus smuggle the animals down into Mexico."

"Barrin' that we don't shlop 'em."

"Off we goes den!" roared Pomp, pulling the starting switch over.

The prairie schooner rushed out of the park.

Reaching the road, she sped along in pursuit of the thieves.

On she rattled furiously, and the men glancing back saw her.

It seemed to alarm them.

With shouts, spurs and whips, they urged the horses on.

They clattered along at the top of their speed, heading for the river bank, the Fury rapidly overhauling them.

Seeming to realize their peril, the rascals took another road that carried them closer to the water, and vanished from Frank's view behind a mass of rocks.

In a few moments the Fury reached the other road.

She flew around the rocks at a terrific pace.

Frank could not see what was ahead until the schooner had rounded the curve, but when he did, a cry of alarm pealed from his lips, and he shut off the current.

He could not stop the machine in time to avoid the danger lurking ahead, although he put on the brake.

In another moment the Fury rushed into a swamp.

Up flew the mire and weeds in a shower that splattered all over the schooner, and when she suddenly paused she was sunk to her hubs in tenacious ooze.

The horse thieves had skirted the marsh.

They knew it was there and would not be seen by their pursuers until the engine was well around the bend, and for the purpose of luring them into it had changed their course.

A yell of exultation pealed from their lips when they saw how successful their plan had been.

Frank eyed them through a field glass, and cried in surprise:

"Why, they are some of Domingo the Demon's men in disguise."

"Arrah, bad cess to thim, they've got us in a bog."

"Pomp, won't she back out of here?"

"No, sah," groaned the coon, after an unsuccessful reversal of the switch. "Kain't mobe her one inch nohow."

"Oh, if we had only known this marsh laid here ready to grasp us!" cried Frank, regretfully.

"Dar dey go, out ob sight 'hind dem trees now," said the coon.

"How the devil are we ter git out av this?" blankly asked Barney.

"The hard ground is fifty feet behind," said Frank, looking back.

"But, begorra, she won't back out of this bog."

"No, but we must rig a tackle and pull her out."

"Dey's boun' fo' ter git away wif dem hosses."

"They certainly will get over the bridge and past Ciudad Juarez," agreed Frank, in grim tones, "but they're bound to leave a trail somewhere, and we'll find it and track them."

"What yo' gwine ter fix de tackle to?" asked Pomp.

"Those rocks behind us."

"Yo' spec's I kin carry a rope ober dar?"

"It will cost you a straggle to wade ashore."

"Got ter do it dough, honey."

"Strip and make the attempt."

The coon took off every stitch of clothing he wore.

In the meantime Frank went into the store-room.

He brought out the same tackle they had used to haul the gold out of the river, and handed the block to the coon.

It had the rope attached to it.
Pomp also had a rope to bind the block fast.
He went down the steps and Frank fastened the hook to the axle.
The other end he was going to secure to a drum under the Fury, which was geared to the wheels, and by ungearing this drum and starting the machinery it would wind in the rope, and thus pull the schooner ashore backward.

Frank handed the slack of the line to Barney.
"As he proceeds pay it out," said the inventor.
"Yis, sor," replied Barney. "Go ahead, ye shmoked herrin'!"
Pomp had gone down the steps and trod on the mud.
He sunk to his ankles.
It seemed to hold more firmly than he expected.
Given confidence by this fact, he went ahead.
Barney let out the line gradually, and it slipped through the sheave of the block, which the coon clutched under his bare arm.
Half the distance to the shore was reached, when a grim smile began to hover over the fun-loving Irishman's face.

He gave the line a tremendous jerk.
A howl escaped the coon, for the sudden backward pull had sent his legs flying from under him.

The next moment he landed on his back in the mud.
A roar of laughter pealed from Barney's lips as he saw the ooze fly up, covering the coon with a plaster that rivaled the dusky hue of his natural skin.

Pomp was a spectacle.
He flopped and floundered, yelled and swore.
Finally he got up, still grasping the block, and shook his ebony fist at the laughing Celt.

"Gosh blame yo'!" he howled. "Wha' fo' yo' don' dat?"
"Faith, ther temptation wor irresist'ble!" confessed Barney. "Oh ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Shet up dar!" bellowed Pomp, furiously.
"Go an wid ye! Shall I do it agin?"
"Yo' gwine ter catch it fo' dat."
"Oh! ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha! Ouch!"

Barney's mouth was wide open as he laughed, and Pomp had scooped up a handful of thick mud, let fly at him, and it struck the Irishman square in the opening.

He sputtered and spit, and a horrible look came over his face, and Pomp burst out laughing at him.
The coon was delighted.

He picked up more of the mud, and the first thing the jocular Barney knew he received a bombardment that plastered his clothing from head to foot.

Letting out a yell of dismay, he fled precipitately.
"It's a coorpse yez will be whin I git me hands on yez!" he yelled.
"Oh—haw—haw—haw!" roared Pomp, who was tickled to turn the tables on the Celt. "S'pec's yo' won't be quite so gay de nex' time I se paddlin' froo de mud."

He continued on to the shore, and Barney dashed into the Fury.
In a few moments the coon had the block secured.
He then plunged into the river, and washed himself.
Frank started the machinery.

There was a tremendous strain brought on the tackle.
It whisked the Fury out upon solid ground in a twinkling, and the tackle was taken off and stowed away.

At least an hour passed before she was ready to go on as the mud had to be washed out of the electric mechanism under the vehicle, and Pomp did the work and returned aboard.

Frank then started her off by the other road.
It ran to the same place the swamp road went to.

Both Barney and Pomp put on clean clothes and went into the turret with Frank.

In a short time they reached the corral where the cattle had been fastened in but found the beasts gone.

A run was made for the bridge and a man was met there who collected tolls.

"Say," said Frank to him. "Did you see a drove of cattle go over the bridge about an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir," replied the toll man.
"There were eleven drovers with them."
"Yes, and some mighty fine horses too."
"Those men were thieves."
"Is it possible?"
"All that cattle was stolen."
"Good heavens!"

"Do you know where they went?"
"I have no idea beyond the direction."
"And what was that?" they eagerly asked Frank.
"I watched them until I reached the other side, saw them talking to some of the Mexican troops on the other side, and then observed that they hastened away to the eastward for the desert."
"Good enough! That's just the information we want!"
Frank thanked the man.

Then he sent the engine flying over the bridge.
Scarcely had the Fury reached the other side when a troop of Mexican cavalry came galloping toward her from a thicket.

They were from Ciudad Juarez.
Putting themselves in the way of the Fury, the captain drew his sword, raised it, and shouted authoritatively to Frank in Spanish:

"Halt!"
"What for?" demanded the inventor, in surprise.
"You are my prisoners, sir!"

"Upon what charge?"

"Outlawry!"

"I deny the charge. Who made it?"

"Some friends of mine who have suffered from you."

"You refer to the drovers who just crossed with some cattle?"

"They are the ones."

"But they themselves are horse thieves."

"You lie! They are friends of mine. Surrender!"

"Never! It is evident that you are shielding those ruffians when your duty was to lock them up!" ringingly cried Frank.

He saw here a conspiracy to ruin him and meant to resent it.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELEVEN MORE CAUGHT.

THE captain of the Mexican cavalymen flushed angrily when Frank refused to surrender, and accused him of shielding the eleven horse-thieves whom he claimed as his friends.

"So you refuse to surrender, eh?" he demanded furiously.

"We are no outlaws!" retorted Frank. "The scoundrels who just came over the bridge from El Paso with a drove of cattle raided a ranch, and stole ten horses. We are going after them too, for we know they are some of Domingo the Demon's men."

"You will regret defying me."

"Oh, no. I have warrants for their arrest from the Governor of Chihuahua, as well as from Texas, and if you interfere with me, you'll have to answer for it, sir!"

This news startled the Mexican captain.

But he was too stubborn to submit to defeat.

"I do not believe you?" he cried. "Since you refuse to peacefully surrender, we will take you dead or alive!"

Frank pulled the shutters down.

It was lucky he did, for the captain ordered his men to fire.

A rain of bullets struck the Fury.

As a battle with the soldiers would only delay them, Frank put full speed on the prairie schooner, and heading her for the eastward, where the bridge tollman saw the thieves go, he started her off.

Away she rushed, the soldiers after her at a gallop.

She quickly outsped their horses and left them behind.

It was clear to Frank that the soldiers were in collusion with the outlaws, as they tried so hard to protect them.

The rascals had an hour's start, but left a plain trail which Frank soon found by the moonlight.

Soon the soldiers were left out of sight.

"When Lasso Charley sells the gold in Austin and meets us where we agreed, I'll tell him of this outrage and have those fellows punished," said Frank to Barney and Pomp.

The Irishman and coon were very indignant.

"Burd's av a feather shtick together," said the Celt. "Thim graisers is as clannish as a family av gorillas, bedad."

"De only fing dat makes dis coon sorry, is dat we didn' gib dem yaller niggahs a few shots fo' ter bring 'em to dar senses."

"Never mind," consolingly said Frank. "They thought they had us cornered so we could not pursue the thieves. But we have given them the slip very nicely. Now to catch those rogues."

"Their trail is gittin' fresher!" said Barney.

"Fo' shuah! Yo' specs dem cows kin go's fast's dis yar bull-gine?"

The Fury was speeding along the desert with nothing ahead but an endless waste, and they eagerly peered out.

In half an hour an object was seen ahead.

It gradually resolved into a number of moving figures.

Shortly afterward Frank distinguished them as the cattle and horses he was in pursuit of.

"There they are now!" he exclaimed.

"Begorry, there's no escape fer them on this desert," said Barney. "Faith, they have no shelter or place av concealment now."

"Dar am gwine ter be some fun yere, honey."

"Prepare yourselves for war," said Frank.

In less than half an hour more they were within hailing distance of the outlaws, and our friends saw that the disguised bandits were making strenuous efforts to escape.

They were sending their long lashes among the cattle and yelling at them at the top of their voices to urge them on.

Fast as the beasts raced along, it was a snail's pace compared with the speed of the Fury.

"Halt where you are!" Frank shouted at them. "Halt, I say, else we'll drop you in your tracks!"

By way of reply the thieves drew their pistols and began discharging them back at the prairie schooner.

Several of the bullets flew into the turret.

Frank had a narrow escape from death.

He tried to close the blinds but they stuck fast.

It left him exposed to their deadly fire, but he escaped unhurt.

He had armed himself, and fired back at them.

Shot after shot pealed out.

Several of the Mexicans fell from their saddles.

The rest abandoned their chase of the cattle, and spread out to escape with their lives.

Barney and Pomp now began to fire.

The three friends recognized the value of each shot, and consequently did not waste any.

Off rushed the cattle in one direction, including the stolen horses, and away dashed the Mexicans in another.

Rendered desperate, they shot back at the Fury, even when they fell wounded from their saddles.

In ten minutes not one of the gang bestrode a mustang, and their yells in different parts of the desert were pitiful to hear, as their wounds pained them frightfully.

Frank and his friends then had a hard task.

It was necessary to disarm and bind them.

When this was finally done and the last man had been thrown aboard of the schooner the young inventor said:

"There goes the cattle! We must turn them back!"

"It's a league or more away from here they bes."

"Bettah not lose no time goin' after dem, sah."

Frank sent his engine racing furiously across the desert and they rapidly overtook the animals.

Terrified by the shots they were speeding along fast, their hoofs pounding the ground like distant rolling thunder.

The Fury made a detour.

Getting in front of them the machine was so guided as to gradually turn them around.

In this manner Frank got them headed back the way they came from.

The fury then chased them.

It frightened the animals greatly.

It was a hard job to keep them bunched, and Frank was kept busy driving the animals back in the herd that rushed off at a tangent, but he kept them together.

As they thus raced along, Pomp came in to relieve him of the wheel.

"I'm going to find out where the rest of the gang is, Pomp," said Frank.

"Gwine fo' ter pump de prisoners?" asked the coon.

"That's my plan."

"Dey's a obstinate set, honey!"

"Yes, I've had evidence of that before."

Frank went back in the store-room where Barney was.

"I'm going to take these men out and shoot them!" said he, with a significant wink at the Irishman.

"Good enough!" replied Barney, taking his cue readily. "Which wan will yez have forst, sor."

"That bony little rascal with the black beard."

"Will yez shtop ther Fury?"

"No, I'll take them one by one in the next room, shoot them and drop them overboard!" said Frank. "Haul him out!"

An excited discussion arose among the prisoners, for some of them understood what Frank said.

They began to yell and plead with him in broken English to spare his life, but he turned a deaf ear to all their pleadings, and Barney hauled out the man in question.

He was taken into the bedroom and gagged, and a pistol shot was discharged out the open door.

Then the inventor and the Irishman hastened back to the storeroom, where the rest were found in a fever of fear.

"Now for the next man!" cried Frank.

"Name ther man an' I'll kill him where he lies."

"Take that man with the pale face."

"I have him!"

"Drag him out."

"Coom an, ye blackguard!"

The man was, as Frank imagined, a terrible coward.

He screamed, yelled and prayed for mercy.

The thought of death rendered him frantic.

That was just the result Frank was aiming at.

When Barney got him in the next room, the inventor said:

"Hold on. I think I'll give him a chance for his life."

"Merciful Heaven! do not kill me!" yelled the man, in Spanish.

"I will spare your life on one condition," replied Frank, assuming his fiercest tone. "But every one of your infernal companions must perish for stealing those horses!"

"I'll do anything you say!" shrieked the frightened wretch.

"Then tell me where Domingo the Demon is with his gang?"

"Yes, yes! You will find them waiting for us to appear with the cattle at Pilaes to-morrow evening."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"I swear it by the blessed Virgin!"

"Remember, if you lie I shall kill you!"

"As I hope for salvation, it is the truth!"

"To-morrow night shall tell the tale."

The Mexican protested so vehemently that he had told the truth, that Frank believed him.

Barney then asked:

"What shall I do wid him?"

"Bring him back to the store-room."

"An' the other wan?"

"Put him in there, too."

The Irishman carried out Frank's instructions.

As soon as the man who confessed saw the one who was supposed to have been shot, the manner in which he had been deceived became apparent.

He swore at Frank furiously under his breath, and told his companions what had transpired.

It was useless to rave, however.

They were at the inventor's mercy, and they feared him, so they quietly waited to find out what their fate would be.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

"THERE lies the town of Pilaes!" said Frank, on the following night, as he pointed toward a number of lights gleaming near the Rio Grande. "The horse thieves are in the place waiting for the rascals we sent over to Fort Lancaster yesterday, in care of the ranch owner we met. Now the owners of that cattle and the stolen horses will get their stock back."

"Bedad, if ther Mexican thafe isn't in this town, I'll murder ther spalpeen as sint us here whin they get through hangin' him!" said Barney.

"Marse Frank, ain't dis yere de place whar Lasso Charley done say he meet us arter he sell de gol' in Austing?"

"Yes, Pomp, but I doubt if we will see anything of him until to-morrow. Have you got the projectiles for the hydraulic guns ready for me?"

"Bofe ob de guns am loaded."

"Yes. I saw you do that."

"An' dar am de missiles in de rack."

"How about your small arms?"

"Done got a hull stack ob rifles ready, sah."

"Good! Now put on your suits of mail."

"Spec much trouble yere?"

"Lots. And get my suit ready."

"Yas, sah."

It was clear that Frank had serious apprehensions.

He would not have taken all these precautions if he hadn't.

By the time they were close to the quaint little town of adobe houses all hands were encased in metal suits.

The arms were all in readiness for use.

Every one was anxious with suspense.

Frank saw that the place had a deserted air.

Only a few mongrel curs barked in the narrow streets, and a few lights gleamed in the big iron-barred windows of the houses.

Not a soul was to be seen.

It might have been owing to the lateness of the hour.

Still it made Frank suspicious.

He knew that this town had once been a Mexican garrison, and now observed that many of the houses had guns mounted on their roofs, commanding the entire place.

The fact that such lawless characters as the horse thieves were openly receiving stolen animals in a populated place made Frank think the inhabitants were friends of the outlaws.

Selecting the widest street, Frank drove the Fury into it.

Along she rolled toward the Plaza de Armas.

But half the distance had been covered, when suddenly there sounded the sharp crack of a rifle.

It seemed to be a signal.

Like magic scores of men appeared.

They emerged from the houses, from side streets, and from various places of concealment.

Every one of them were armed.

On the roof-tops swarmed scores more, and they were seen in windows, doorways, and in fact everywhere.

"We have run in a trap," said Frank.

"Dey been spectin' us!" cried Pomp.

"Look out!" admonished Barney, in alarm. "They're goin' ter foire!"

Even as he spoke a heavy volley of musketry was poured out on all sides at the electric prairie carriage.

She was struck all over, but her blinds were drawn then.

A tremendous shout arose hoarsely from every throat.

"Here they are!" was the cry.

"Kill them!"

"Blow the machine to pieces!"

"Show no quarter!"

"Down with the rascals!"

Frank heard their cries and said:

"They saw us coming. The horse thieves have won their sympathy, and have incited them to attack us for some reason."

"Be heavens, we've roon into a hornet's nest!" said Barney.

"Out of the way!" yelled a voice. "Use the guns against them! The rifle balls cannot pierce her metal plates!"

It was Domingo the Demon who spoke.

Surrounded by the few remnants of his gang, he stood on a roof at the breach of a gun.

The people fled in all directions.

Frank shouted to them, explaining his mission.

"We are after the horse thief, Domingo the Demon!" he cried, loudly. "The villain is in your midst! We are sanctioned by the law to take him and his men!"

A derisive yell greeted these remarks.

"We know nothing of such a person!" some one roared.

"Resist us no longer, or we shall return your fire!"

Another wild yell of contempt greeted Frank.

The young inventor saw that it was of no use to parley.

The people were excited.

No one would heed him.

He therefore aimed the guns toward his enemies.

The next moment they were discharged.

Following the thunderous reports came the grinding and the splitting sound of the buildings being smashed by the shots.

An appalling roar went up from the excited crowd.

Many more rifle shots were fired continually now, the bullets clicking against the engine like hail.

Domingo the Demon was furious.

He had escaped injury, but some of his men were killed and wounded, and he aimed a gun at the Fury.

Frank had the prairie schooner moving.

Boom! roared the gun and a ball flew from its muzzle.

It struck the Fury.

Crash!

The engine was knocked against a house.

Boom! Boom! thundered two more guns on the roofs.

Each of these shots struck the prairie schooner.

One of them tore her hind driving wheel to pieces, another smashed a big hole in her side, and the third ripped off her front wheels.

It was impossible to do anything with her then.

She toppled over, a complete wreck.

"To remain here means death!" cried Frank. "See! We are opposite a door of the house the Fury lies against. Come out!"

They hastily sprang out the door of the ruined prairie schooner.

In through the house door they dashed unseen, and several more gunshots were fired down at the Fury, smashing her to pieces.

A yell of triumph escaped the crowd when they saw her destroyed, and a rush was made toward her.

"Get the gold! Get the gold from her that they got from the river, and it is yours for protecting us, as I promised you!" yelled Domingo the Demon.

Now Frank understood what incited the town's people to so furiously attack the prairie schooner.

He saw the bandit in the street.

Raising his rifle Frank fired at him.

A yell of agony escaped the horse thief, and flinging up his arms he fell heavily to the ground, badly wounded.

Then the people knew where our friends were.

They rushed for the house.

Before they could reach the door a tremendous shout arose down the street, arresting their attention.

A troop of U. S. cavalymen, headed by Lasso Charley, had just come into the town and heard the firing.

Then they saw the ruined prairie schooner.

Realizing what happened, as Lasso Charley had told them about their mission, and fearing that Frank and his friends were killed, they charged on the people.

Seeing the large body of cavalymen charging on them, the Mexicans fled in wild disorder.

Out hurried Frank, Barney and Pomp into the street, and seeing Lasso Charley and the rescuing soldiers, they uttered a cheer.

In a remarkably short space of time the streets were cleared, and the troops reached our friends.

Hurried explanations ensued.

Lasso Charley said he sold the gold when he got to Austin, and hastening to Pilaes by railroad, fell in with the soldiers with the result already known to our readers.

The prairie schooner was completely demolished.

The only things worth saving were Barney's fiddle and Pomp's banjo, and these they quickly secured.

Domingo the Demon was picked up, and so were several of his men, our friends were mounted with some of the soldiers, and the whole cavalcade drove from the town unmolested.

They were bound for Fort Lancaster, and thither our friends went, when all the ranch owners were sent for.

They arrived with Mr. Goodwin, and an account was rendered to them of what had been done.

Frank's work was perfectly satisfactory.

The Mexican's gang of horse thieves was completely broken up and never troubled that section of the country again, for they were all prosecuted for their crimes and went to prison.

Lasso Charley divided the amount he got for the gold with Frank, Barney and Pomp, and Mr. Goodwin gave the inventor an order for the \$50,000 reward left in Readestown.

That settled the business.

Leaving Lasso Charley with his employer, and taking leave of Mr. Goodwin, our friends returned home perfectly satisfied with the result of their trip in the prairie schooner.

The only regret was that she had been destroyed before Frank could consummate a bargain with the government for it.

They arrived safely in Readestown, and Frank was soon in the midst of his family again, and they received the reward money.

It was equally divided among the three friends.

Frank began the construction of another invention soon afterwards, and an account of the use the three friends put it to will soon be given to our readers in the book to follow this one.

[THE END.]

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